

Adoption Mtg w/ Foundation Leaders

CLINTON LIBRARY PHOTOCOPY

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
TALKING POINTS FOR ADOPTION MEETING
WITH FOUNDATION LEADERS
AUGUST 2, 1996**

[OPEN BY ASKING EACH PERSON TO INTRODUCE THEMSELVES.]

- I'd like to thank all of you for coming. I'm so glad that you are able to join me today. This discussion is an opportunity to talk about the barriers to adoption, what you have been doing to overcome those barriers, what we have been doing, and how we can build stronger partnerships to work together.
- You know all too well about the tens of thousands of waiting children who want and need permanent homes. You also know about the problems in the American adoption process -- the complex regulations, outdated assumptions, financial burdens and institutional inertia -- that often prevent loving adults from giving homes to those children.
- We have each met children who have touched our lives and motivated us to do more. Let me tell you just one story about a waiting child who I met last year. Her name is Deanna. Deanna spoke eloquently at an event at the White House in honor of National Adoption Month about living for years in foster care and a group home. She said, very simply, that she wanted to be adopted so that she could have a place to call home, a room to call her own, and a family that she could love and would love her back. Deanna got her wish. After a family heard her at the event, they adopted her. I was fortunate to see Deanna and her mother during a recent visit to Kansas City. She looks wonderful, and she beamed as I heard about school activities and the swim team.
- I believe that we all have a role to play in finding homes for children and solving the problems of our adoption and child welfare systems. The foundation community has been instrumental. You have worked with states, communities, child welfare agencies, business and the courts. Through funding and leadership, you have increased awareness and have encouraged innovation and coalition building. The progress we have made so far has only been possible because of your commitment and contributions.
- The President and I are also committed to easing and encouraging the adoption process.
 - The Administration has increased by 60% the number of children with special needs who have been adopted with federal adoption assistance.

- The President signed and urged swift and vigorous implementation of the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act -- so that children will not languish in foster care because of restrictions on interracial adoptions.
- We have worked with courts in 49 states to improve the timeliness and quality of decision-making that leads to adoption.
- We championed the Family and Medical Leave Act -- which enables parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or health insurance.
- We have worked to increase public awareness through public service announcements, speeches, writings and special events.
- The President has given his strong support to legislation that would give families who adopt a child a \$5,000 tax credit. This would allow middle-class families, for whom adoption may be prohibitively expensive, to adopt children to love and nurture.
- In the welfare bill, we fought for and succeeded in: preserving the entitlement to foster care and adoption assistance; maintaining the Family Preservation and Family Support program; and adding funding for evaluation and automated child protection systems.
- Yet despite all of our efforts, we find ourselves in a continuing and escalating crisis. The numbers of children who should be exiting the foster care system for adoption are growing. At the same time, I hear of more and more available and ready parents who turn away from the adoption system in frustration and despair. We can and must do more.
- We all agree that we need to put partisan politics and organizational politics aside in order to solve this problem. I've read about what you've been doing in the descriptions you sent and am very impressed by your efforts. I hope you will share your experiences in more detail. I'd also like to spend time talking about what the government can do better -- both in the short-term and as we think about long-term strategies on adoption and child welfare. Finally, I'd like your ideas about what we can do together to create effective public-private partnerships.

[OPEN DISCUSSION.]

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**FACSIMILE TRANSMISSION**

**ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY
370 L'ENFANT PROMENADE, S.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20447**

TO:*Nicole Rabner***Telephone:****Fax:****Number of Pages (excluding cover):***450-6244***FROM:**

**Wendy Jacobson
Special Assistant to the
Deputy Assistant Secretary**

Telephone:**Fax:****(202) 260-1853****(202) 205-3848****MESSAGE:**

*Talking points &
accomplishments,
as discussed*

*To: Jean Klein
Fr: Nicole Rabner*

**Talking Points for the First Lady
for Her Discussion of Adoption
with Foundation Representatives**

- I've invited you here today to talk about current and future projects in the area of permanency planning -- I'm interested in your research on and experience with best practices as well as your perceptions of the most significant obstacles and possible solutions.
- We believe that to secure adoptive homes for all of the children who are waiting, a broad base of support must be forged -- from the public and private sectors, from different levels of government and from communities.
- We are indebted to the foundation community for its significant contributions to helping waiting children find permanent homes, and to the field of adoption in general.
- Foundations have helped get the issue of adoption on the public screen and have been at the cutting-edge of program and policy development through funding and leadership that encourages innovation, experimentation, dissemination of knowledge, and the building of broad coalitions.
 - In the 1970's, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation helped promote efforts to develop model approaches to placing children out of the foster care system -- demonstrating that it could be done and setting the stage for the adoption opportunities and child welfare amendments of 1980.
 - Clark also helped develop a cadre of leaders in child welfare agencies and the legal community who were committed to improving adoption outcomes. They put critically needed resources into permanency planning projects and judicial training.
 - Through its "Families for Kids" initiative, the Kellogg Foundation has assisted states in refocusing their attention on adoption and at the same time on examining how service delivery must change to improve outcomes for children.
 - The Dave Thomas Foundation continues to work hard to promote special needs adoption and corporate benefits for adoptive families.
- This Administration has also made a strong and significant commitment to finding permanent homes for waiting children:
 - The number of children with special needs who have

been adopted with federal adoption assistance has increased by 60% under President Clinton.

- We fought hard to protect the guarantee that families prepared to adopt would be provided with federal assistance to do so.

- We've worked to expedite enforcement of the Multiethnic Placement Act, and to think creatively with states about how they can improve recruitment of families of all races.

- We've supported an adoption tax credit.

(See adoption accomplishments sheet for additional points).

- Yet despite our efforts, and those of the foundation community, we find ourselves in a continuing and escalating crisis. The numbers of children who should be exiting the foster care system to adoption are going up. And our ability to generate the family resources these children need is not keeping pace.
- I've convened us today to talk about what we can do about this -- to ensure that every child who needs a family has one. I want to learn from your experiences and explore opportunities for the foundation community as well as the federal government in helping to accomplish this goal.

Questions for discussion:

1. What have foundations done in the past in this and/or related areas?
2. What lessons have participants learned about making it possible for more waiting children to be adopted?
3. What are the barriers or obstacles that you see -- what's hard?
4. What are the most critical issues we can address today in the adoption arena -- how should we prioritize?

Challenges to the group:

- Foundations can play a leadership role in helping to improve the decision-making process in the courts and agencies by:
 - funding expansion of the court improvement project;
 - Helping to train members of the judiciary and the bar

on termination of parental rights and other critical issues;

- Foundations can support the development and/or reinvigoration of adoption advocacy networks on the community level. They can help these networks expand what they are able to do to improve adoption outcomes for children in the community.
- Foundations can promote adoption among public employees at the state and local levels.

ADOPTION: HELPING CHILDREN AND PARENTS

Promoting adoption is one of the most important things we can do to strengthen American families and give more children what every child in America deserves -- loving parents and a healthy home.

--President Clinton

For many children in the United States, adoption is their only opportunity to become part of a permanent and loving family. Adoption assistance programs help thousands of children and parents each year to form new and happy families.

Adoption enriches the lives of adults by enabling them to become parents and share their love with children who desperately need the support that can only be provided by nurturing parents. Because strong, loving families are the cornerstones of stable and caring communities, adoption also strengthens our nation.

Today, there are tens of thousands children in the nation's foster care system who can not return safely to their homes, who need permanent placement in new families and for whom adoption is a goal. Almost one third of these children are legally free and are waiting to be adopted. Almost half of these waiting children had been waiting for more than two years. More than half of waiting children have special medical, developmental, behavioral or psychological needs; they are minority children, older children and/or sibling groups.

President Clinton has taken key steps to encourage and increase adoptions of special needs children and to support the families that choose to open their hearts and their homes to these children. He has championed programs that find and assist adopting families, and is committed to breaking down barriers, including high adoption costs and complex regulations.

Removing Barriers to Adoption

The Administration supports Titles I and II of the Adoption Promotion and Stability Act of 1996. Title I provides an adoption tax credit for families who want to adopt and Title II is consistent with current law, the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1995 (MEPA), and with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act which prohibits discrimination based on race, color or national origin in all federally funded programs. This policy will alleviate a significant barrier to adoption and allow middle class families, for whom adoption may be prohibitively expensive, to adopt children to love and nurture. It will put parents seeking to build a family through adoption on a more equal footing with other families. In October 1994, President Clinton signed the Multiethnic Placement Act, which helps increase the number of adoptions by prohibiting discrimination based on race or ethnicity, and by increasing recruitment of parents. Forty-seven states and the District of Columbia are now in compliance.



Department of Health and Human Services
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Increasing Special Needs Adoptions

During this Administration, the number of children with special needs who have been adopted with Federal adoption assistance has increased by over 60 percent.

Improving Court Operations

The Administration is working with state courts in 49 states to improve the timeliness and quality of decision-making that leads to adoption. More timely decisions will ensure children do not languish in foster care and can more quickly be placed in permanent, stable families that can nurture and protect them.

Preserving Critical Supports

The President has also stood firm throughout the budget debate to protect funds for key supports such as Medicaid benefits for special needs adopted children, SSI for children, and adoption assistance -- these services are critical for many adoptive families and children. The President vetoed the Congress's welfare reform legislation because it did not provide enough incentives and support to help parents move from welfare to work and the bill would hurt children. The bill dissolved the guarantee to states for open-ended funding for foster care and adoption assistance which might have been put the most vulnerable children at risk of danger and harm.

Supporting Parents

This Administration has championed the Family and Medical Leave Act, the first bill signed into law by the President, which enables parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or health insurance.

Strengthening Families

The Family Preservation and Support Act, passed in 1993, provided almost \$1 billion over five years for the development of community-based preventive and supportive services for families with children. States can use these funds to support and alleviate the crisis in adoptive families.

Increasing Public Awareness

Both President and Mrs. Clinton have made it a priority to increase the public's awareness about the importance and benefits of adoption. Through speeches, radio addresses, public service announcements and special events, the First Family has spoken out about adoption. The First Lady dedicated two of her nationally syndicated columns to adoption and included the importance of adoption in her recently published book.

National Adoption Month

In November 1995, the First Lady held a moving and memorable event at the White House to promote adoption during National Adoption Month. The event featured Dave Thomas of Wendy's, HHS Secretary Donna E. Shalala, adoptive parents, a community organization recruiting adoptive parents and children awaiting adoption. A public service announcement featuring Mrs. Clinton was aired in over 50 major cities across the country. In addition, the First Lady celebrated motherhood through adoption on Mother's Day by inviting adoptive moms and their children to the White House.

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Focusing on Outcomes and Accountability

The Administration is shifting the Federal government's role from a focus on how well forms are filled out to a focus on how well children are doing. Permanent placement is a critical outcome. States have been given increased flexibility and technical assistance so that they can reform their child welfare systems. We are working with 48 states to automate their child welfare systems and reduce the paperwork burden on caseworkers.

Working Women Count Honor Roll

The Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor enlisted honor roll pledges from corporations and state and local governments to encourage and recruit parents to adopt and make adoption easier for workers and their families.

Expediting Adoptions from Foster Care

The Clinton Administration has provided every state with technical assistance to speed the adoption of children in foster care. This help comes through the National Resource Center on Special Needs Adoption and regional adoption conferences. In April, HHS brought together state foster care and adoption managers and court officials to work in partnership to designing systems that work better for children and families.

Statistics

During 1993 (most current data available,) an estimated 18,000 children who had been in foster care had their adoptions finalized. Another 17,000 were placed in adoptive families and are awaiting legalization. Another 86,000 children in the foster care system had the goal of adoption, 21,000 of whom were legally free (i.e. parental rights had been terminated.)

In 1996, about 120,000 children are expected to receive adoption assistance which is the federal subsidy to encourage and support the adoption of children with special needs. Eighty percent of waiting children in the foster care system have special needs including physical or mental disabilities, older children and sibling groups.

For more information

To get more information on how to become an adoptive parent, interested persons and the general public can call the National Adoption Center at 1-800-TO-ADOPT.



Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20447
Phone: (202) 401-9215 || May 1996

May 9, 1996

MOTHER'S DAY DISCUSSION WITH ADOPTIVE MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

DATE: Friday, May 10th
LOCATION: Roosevelt Room
TIME: 11:15 - 12:30
FROM: Nicole Rabner

I. PURPOSE

To highlight adoption on the occasion of Mother's Day, listen to a wide range of stories from adoptive mothers and their children and demonstrate the Administration's commitment to promoting adoption.

II. BACKGROUND

As you know, this is a particularly appropriate time to focus attention on adoption, both because of Mother's Day and because of the legislation pending in the Congress. For this listening session, we have assembled six mothers and their children whose adoption stories reflect the wide range of adoption experiences - from adopting a newborn to transracial adoption to special needs adoption to older-child adoption.

Program

You will first have a chance to greet the discussion participants informally in the Map Room. While they proceed to the Roosevelt Room and are seated for the discussion, you will have some briefing time. You will then proceed to the Roosevelt Room and take your seat (you are seated between Carol Adams, 26, and Margaret Fitzgerald (with 4-year-old William on her lap)). Following your opening remarks, you will initiate the discussion and act as moderator. The mothers will each tell her unique adoption story. You will close the discussion.

III. PARTICIPANTS

Discussion

-HRC

-Six adoptive mothers and six children (see attached annotated list)

Observers

-Ann Rosewater, DHHS

-Carol Williams, DHHS

-Karen Dorsey, DHHS

-Carol Johnson, President, National Adoption Center

-Gloria Hochman, Director of Communications and Marketing, National Adoption Center

-Reginald Fitzgerald, husband of Adrienne (discussion member)

IV. SCENARIO

- HRC proceeds to Map Room to meet and greet discussion participants
- While discussion participants proceed to Roosevelt Room, HRC has briefing time
- HRC proceeds to Roosevelt Room and is seated for discussion
- HRC makes opening remarks and initiates discussion
- Discussion continues for approximately 45 minutes
- HRC closes discussion.

V. PRESS PLAN

Open Press.

VI. REMARKS

Opening remarks provided by Jen Klein. Sample questions also provided.

**MOTHER'S DAY ADOPTION EVENT
DISCUSSION PARTICIPANTS**

**Lorraine Adams (W) and 26-year-old Carol Adams Gray (W),
Douglasville, GA (outside of Atlanta)**

Mrs. Adams and her husband have raised 12 children -- 2 birth children and 10 adopted children, including a transracial adoption, foster children in their care, a sibling group (of which Carol is a part). Mrs. Adams met Carol when she was 12 at General Protestant Children's Home in St. Louis, MO, and was told that Carol would never amount to anything. Carol has flourished since being adopted, is now married and works as an occupational therapist technician. Mrs. Adams believes that every child deserves a chance and can thrive when given the permanency of a home and parents who care.

**Pat Antrobus (W) and 28-year-old Keith (W)
New Hope, PA (Outside of Philadelphia)**

Mrs. Antrobus and her husband, Kirby, who were unable to conceive, adopted two sons after seeing them in a "Friday's Child" feature that appears regularly in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and highlights children waiting for adoption. Both boys are mildly mentally retarded and were teenagers when they were adopted.

**Margaret Wiggins Fitzgerald (AA) and 4-year-old William (AA),
Cheverly, MD**

Mrs. Fitzgerald and her husband, Reginald, adopted William, now 4, when he was a 10-week-old baby, and are in the process of adopting another baby through Prince George's County Department of Social Services. Mr and Mrs. Fitzgerald now participate in workshops held by the social services agency to encourage families to adopt and disabuse potential adoptive couples of misconceptions about how difficult adoption can be. Mrs. Fitzgerald's employer, which was then AT&T, totally reimbursed her for her legal fees and gave her two-months of unpaid leave, which she felt was critical to allowing her to bond with her newly adopted baby.

**Jude Lincicome (W) and 8-year-old Jeremy (W)
Baltimore, MD**

A single mother and a nurse, Jude Lincicome is currently raising four multi-handicapped adopted children. A 27-week-old premature baby, Jeremy is now blind with cerebral palsy. He is in the second grade in Baltimore County public school. Ms. Lincicome believes that it is not she, but the children who are wonderful, that their courage and zest for life are incredible and that her own effort "is quite minuscule compared to what they do." Her four children were predicted to languish and have been medical success stories. Ms. Lincicome believe that there is nothing

more important than for a child to have a "forever home."

Julie Stinger (W) and 10-year-old Joey (AA)
Montgomery County, MD

A teacher at White Flint Country Day School in Rockville, MD, Ms. Stinger is a single mother of five adopted children, four of which are transracial adoptions. Josef is ten and bi-racial. He and his younger brother lived with Ms. Stinger in foster care, both had learning disabilities and other health problems stemming from malnutrition. According to Ms. Stinger, when, in 1988, she took steps to adopt the two boys in her care, there was an "uproar" within the social services agency because they were transracial adoptions, and the social workers used "scare tactics" to prevent the adoption. The agency also put the boys on the National Adoption Line to search for an African American family with whom to place the children, also slowing the adoption process. Ms. Stinger, however, would not relent in her efforts to adopt the boys and challenged the social workers to find a more committed mother. Furthermore, she produced a letter from a therapist saying that it would be far more detrimental to move the children than to allow the transracial adoption. The adoption ultimately went through and the social worker apologized to Ms. Stinger. Two of Ms. Stinger's other adopted children came to her through foster care and one came through a private adoption -- each of them have health issues stemming from exposure to drugs, alcohol or cigarettes.

Adrienne Ward (AA) and 6-year-old Duncan (AA)
Philadelphia, PA

Mrs. Ward and her husband, Eric, are raising three adopted children. Duncan, the first addition to the Ward family, was adopted as a baby by Adrienne before she married Eric. Together, they adopted Brianna, now three, as a premature baby with a family history of mental illness. They are currently in the process of adopting Deanna, now 12, who is living with them in preadoptive care and had suffered from emotional problems due to a background of child abuse. Both children are now thriving.

SEATING CHART

X HRC

X Carol Adams

X Margaret and William
Fitzgerald

X Lorraine Adams

X Jeremy Lincicome

X Joey Stinger

X Jude Lincicome

X Julie Stinger

X Keith Antrobus

X Duncan Ward

X Pat Antrobus

X Adrienne Ward

Potential Questions

Mother's Day Event

1. Tell me about your child(ren)?
2. What have been the major joys?
3. What have been the major challenges?
4. What led you to decide to adopt?
5. What was your child's life like prior to coming to you?
6. How have you seen your child grow?
7. For you, what are the major differences in parenting by adoption and parenting by birth?
8. What has adoption meant to your family (immediate and extended)?

ADOPTION

THE FACTS:

- ▶ In December 1993 (the last year for which data are available), there were approximately 21,000 foster children in the U. S. waiting to be adopted.
- ▶ Of the children awaiting adoption at the end of 1993, approximately 41 % had already waited two years.
- ▶ Eight out of ten waiting children have special needs (e.g. special medical, developmental, behavioral or psychological needs; minority children; older children; or sibling groups).

THE RECORD:

HR 4, the welfare reform bill vetoed by President Clinton would have impeded Federal efforts to find safe, loving, adoptive homes for children caught in the foster care system. For example, HR 4 would have:

- ▶ **Eliminated funding for one-time adoption costs** -- Under current law, families that adopt eligible children with special needs are entitled to reimbursement for their one-time adoption costs. HR 4 would have eliminated funding for these payments, potentially making it impossible for a willing family to adopt a foster child, because the family could not afford the one-time adoption costs.
- ▶ **Curtailed recruitment and training** -- Currently, states are guaranteed partial reimbursement of their expenses for recruiting and training foster and adoptive families. HR 4 would have ended this guarantee, and capped and cut funding, making it harder for states to find adoptive homes for children with special needs.
- ▶ **Repealed the Adoption Opportunities program** -- The Adoption Opportunities program is a targeted program that facilitates national and community-level innovations to overcome barriers to adoption and to find adoptive families for special needs children. HR 4 would have repealed this important effort, and folded it into a large block grant.

In addition, the version of HR 4 originally approved by the House Ways and Means Committee and passed by the House of Representatives in March of 1995, would have repealed the current federal entitlement for adoption assistance payments for children with special needs (Title IVE of the Social Security Act) and replaced this essential program with a block grant to the states. Under the current IVE program, families that adopt children with special needs (children with special medical, developmental, behavioral or psychological needs; minority children; older children; or sibling groups) are entitled to receive ongoing subsidies to help them support these children. The repeal of this guaranteed assistance would have made it even more difficult to find loving adoptive homes for these children. Both the Senate and the Conference Committee rejected this House proposal in HR 4.

ADOPTION Fact Sheet

How does the adoption system work?

- ▶ Under state and federal laws, before exploring adoption possibilities, state child welfare agencies are required to try to reunite children with their parents when a child's safety can be assured. States are required to make a determination regarding reunification or adoption within one year.
- ▶ Between 50 and 70% of all children initially placed in foster care eventually are returned to their parents.
- ▶ When reunification is not possible, state and federal laws require efforts to find a permanent home for a child, preferably through adoption. All state laws require that, before an adoption can take place, the legal rights of the biological parents be severed through a state court proceeding.

Who are the children who need adoptive homes?

- ▶ One group consists of children, primarily infants, whose parents voluntarily relinquish them for adoption; little is known about these children or the nature of their adoptive placements because their parents generally deal with private adoption agencies or make private placements with adoptive families.
- ▶ A second group of children are those who have been placed in foster care based on court determination that they were abused or neglected, and for whom reunification efforts have been unsuccessful.
- ▶ In December 1993, there were approximately 86,000 foster children in the country for whom state agencies had determined that adoption was the appropriate goal. Approximately 21,000 of these children were legally free to be adopted (their parents' legal rights to ever regain custody had been terminated) and were waiting to be adopted.
- ▶ Thirty-Two (32.4%) percent of the children awaiting adoption were white, 52% (51.8%) African American, 5.5% Hispanic. Only two percent of these children were under age 1; 28% were between the ages of 1 and 5; 45% were 6-12 years of age; and 25% were over the age of 12. The median age was 9 years.
- ▶ Eight out of ten waiting children have special needs: medical, developmental, behavioral or psychological.

How long do children wait for adoption?

- ▶ Of the children awaiting adoption at the end of 1993, approximately 41% had already waited two years.
- ▶ It takes substantially longer to find homes for minority children. Older children and sibling groups irrespective of race also have longer waits.
- ▶ Many children are never adopted, even though their biological parents' parental rights have been terminated.

Why does it take so long and why do so many children go unadopted?

- ▶ Finding adoptive homes for older children and those with emotional or physical problems requires aggressive action by agencies, and most of the children waiting for adoption fall into these categories.
- ▶ In 1993, 45% of the children waiting for adoption were 6 to 12 years old; only 2% were infants. Eight out of ten children -- nearly a 75% increase since 1984 -- had some special need: they were disabled, older, had siblings, or were minority.
- ▶ Lengthy processes to terminate parental rights, lack of financial resources for adoption, excessive caseloads and difficulty in recruiting foster and adoptive families contribute to the slow adoption of many of these children.
- ▶ There is some evidence that the adoption of minority children is being slowed because some foster care and adoption agencies are unwilling or reluctant to place these children with non-minority families. Some state agencies have followed explicit or implicit policies that make race or ethnicity the primary consideration in placement thus reducing the pool of available families.

What is the Clinton Administration doing to increase adoptions?

- ▶ The Administration is ensuring that states make full and effective use of the Adoption Assistance program, which provides critical economic support to families who adopt special needs children, since they may have large medical and other expenses. Under the Clinton Administration, the number of children for whom adoption subsidies are provided has increased by about 60%.
- ▶ Grants have been provided to public and private agencies to develop successful models for recruiting families, provision of post-legal adoption services, support for parent groups, and the development of training curricula.
- ▶ The Administration has conducted national and regional leadership conferences to build the capacity of public and private agencies to facilitate the adoption of minority and special needs children.
- ▶ The Administration provides support for the National Adoption Exchange, the Adoption Clearinghouse, the National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption, and the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance.
- ▶ The Administration is committed to fully enforcing the Multiethnic Placement Act, whose non-discrimination and recruitment provisions should increase the number of children who are adopted.
- ▶ The Clinton Administration has expressed strong concerns about "welfare reform" proposals that would jeopardize these programs and eliminate the guarantee of federal funds to help support adoptions.
- ▶ November is National Adoption month. The Administration is providing national leadership in showcasing America's waiting children and the need for stable, permanent, nurturing families.
- ▶ Under the Clinton Administration, the Children's Bureau is developing a National Strategic Plan for Adoption with the input from States, national organizations, adoptive parents, foundations and adopted children.

ADOPTION: HELPING CHILDREN AND PARENTS

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Preserving Critical Supports

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Focusing on Outcomes and Accountability

The Administration is shifting the Federal government's role from a focus on how well forms are filled out to a focus on how well children are doing. Permanent placement is a critical outcome. States have been given increased flexibility and technical assistance so that they can reform their child welfare systems. We are working with 48 states to automate their child welfare systems and reduce the paperwork burden on caseworkers.

Working Women Count Honor Roll

The Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor enlisted honor roll pledges from corporations and state and local governments to encourage and recruit parents to adopt and make adoption easier for workers and their families.

Expediting Adoptions from Foster Care

The Clinton Administration has provided every state with technical assistance to speed the adoption of children in foster care. This help comes through the National Resource Center on Special Needs Adoption and regional adoption conferences. In April, HHS brought together state foster care and adoption managers and court officials to work in partnership to designing systems that work better for children and families.

Statistics

During 1993 (most current data available,) an estimated 18,000 children who had been in foster care had their adoptions finalized. Another 86,000 children in the foster care system had the goal of adoption, 21,000 of whom were legally free (i.e. parental rights had been terminated.)

In 1996, about 120,000 children are expected to receive adoption assistance which is the federal subsidy to encourage and support the adoption of children with special needs. Eighty percent of children in the foster care system have special needs including physical or mental disabilities, older children and sibling groups.

For more information

To get more information on how to become an adoptive parent, interested persons and the general public can call the National Adoption Center at 1-800-TO-ADOPT.

**Background for
H. R. 3286 "Adoption Promotion and Stability Act of 1996"**

The Act contains two principal substantive provisions relating to nondiscrimination in adoption and foster care placement to further its objective of increasing the number of children who are adopted.

- The Act prevents discrimination in the placement of children on the basis of race, color, or national origin by prohibiting states or public and private foster care and adoption agencies from delaying or denying the placement of any child solely on the basis of race, color or national origin.
- The Act promotes the recruitment of foster and adoptive parents to meet children's needs.

Any violation of the Act's provisions would trigger a process that can result in financial sanctions.

- o The pending legislation (H.R. 3286 "Adoption Promotion and Stability Act of 1996") introduced by Congresswoman Susan Molinari would tighten the anti-discrimination provisions of MEPA, impose financial sanctions to states in non-compliance with the bill's provisions and provide a \$5,000 tax credit to families adopting children.
- o The Clinton administration supports Titles I and II of H.R. 3286. Title I will provide an adoption tax credit and allow middle class families, for whom adoption may be prohibitively expensive, to adopt children to love and nurture. Title II, the interethnic provision, removes barriers to interracial adoption and is consistent with the Administration's policy and longstanding goal to end the historical bias against interracial adoptions. (H.R. 32286 is scheduled for discussion on the House floor on Friday - May 10th)
- o The Clinton administration is very supportive of any and all efforts that encourage adoption and make it easier for states and parents to strengthen families by providing a safe and nurturing home for children. In particular, the administration believes the bill strengthens the anti-discrimination prohibitions.

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

May 6, 1996

Dear Mr. Speaker:

I am writing to express my strong support for The Adoption Promotion and Stability Act of 1996. Today, families seeking to adopt children face significant barriers, including high adoption costs, complex regulations, and outdated assumptions. I am committed to breaking down these barriers and making adoption easier. Promoting adoption is one of the most important things we can do to strengthen American families and give more children what every child in America deserves -- loving parents and a healthy home. This legislation will help children in need of adoptive homes to be united with devoted parents.

My Administration has worked hard to promote adoption in general, and adoption of children with special needs in particular. We championed the Family and Medical Leave Act which enables parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or their health insurance. We strongly supported the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act to help increase the number of adoptions by prohibiting discrimination based on race or ethnicity, and we remain committed to enforcing that law vigorously. As part of our 1993 deficit reduction package, I signed into law a provision that requires ERISA plans to provide the same health coverage for adopted children as for biological children of plan participants. We have worked to preserve Federal support for adoption of children with special needs, and increased by 60 percent the number of children with special needs who have been adopted with Federal adoption assistance.

But together we can and must do more. I strongly support the adoption tax credit in this bill. It will alleviate a significant barrier to adoption and allow middle class families, for whom adoption may be prohibitively expensive, to adopt children to love and nurture. It will encourage adoption of children with special needs. It will put parents seeking to build a family through adoption on a more equal footing with other families.

I believe that the bill is consistent with the Administration's policy and my longstanding goal to end the historical bias against interracial adoptions, which too often has meant interminable waits for children to be matched with parents of the same race. The Administration also has some concerns regarding some of the provisions used to offset the cost

The Honorable Newt Gingrich
Page Two

of the bill and would like to work with the Congress on these provisions. In addition, we need to ensure that unnecessary provisions are not included in the legislation.

The Adoption Promotion and Stability Act is an important first step toward meeting the challenge of removing barriers to adoption. I look forward to working with you so that the dreams of the waiting children in this country to have permanent homes and loving families can become a reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bill Clinton" with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke at the end.

The Honorable Newt Gingrich
Speaker of the
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

MULTIETHNIC PLACEMENT ACT

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS

Since the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) was enacted in October 1994, the Department of Health and Human Services has taken aggressive actions to ensure that states comply with the Act's prohibition against delaying or denying the adoption of children on the basis of race, color or national origin.

- ▶ **HHS quickly sent information to the states about the new law, issued guidance to the states to ensure full and prompt compliance, and reviewed state laws, regulations and published policies on adoption and foster care.**
- ▶ **Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia were notified that their statutes, regulations or policies were not in compliance with the new law. Many of these states were operating under preferences for race-based placements, while others were allowing delays for purposes of making same-race placements -- impermissible policies which imposed barriers to the timely adoption of waiting children.**
- ▶ **HHS required states to take immediate action to comply with the letter and spirit of MEPA and provided training, technical assistance and extensive materials to assist state efforts.**

Numerous states changed statutes, regulations and policies to eliminate the impermissible use of race, color or national origin in foster care and adoption placements. By January of 1996, 47 states and the District of Columbia were in compliance with HHS' strict enforcement of MEPA.

- ▶ **For example, New Mexico put new regulations, policies and procedures into effect in October 1995, after HHS identified impermissible procedures establishing same race/ethnicity placement and time periods to search for same race/ethnicity foster care and adoption placements.**
- ▶ **Two of the remaining four states (KY and MN) are expected to make the changes required to ensure compliance with MEPA's prohibitions by July 1996. Because of its bi-annual legislative calendar, the remaining state (AR) is expected to be in full compliance by April 1997.**
- ▶ **HHS is also working closely with states to comply with MEPA's additional requirement that states provide for the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families who are capable of meeting the needs of children with various cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds.**

The aggressive implementation of MEPA is one of many steps HHS has taken to promote the adoption of children, especially children with special needs.

5/7/96

A Good Mother's Day Gift: Pass the Adoption Bill

Howard Metzenbaum did something this week that should qualify for "Ripley's Believe It Or Not." The former liberal Democratic senator endorsed a Republican measure to overturn a bill that he pushed through two years ago and that even bears his name.

Specifically, Sen. Metzenbaum embraced legislation that would prohibit racial discrimination in adoption. This is an issue Howard Metzenbaum cares about so deeply that he has taken on both the Na-



Politics & People

By Albert R. Hunt

tional Association of Black Social Workers and the Clinton administration's Health and Human Services bureaucrats. He feels his bill has been undercut, so he's supporting House Republican efforts to achieve the same goal.

This is part of a broader pro-adoption bill that the Republicans are bringing to the floor next week, not coincidentally only a few days before Mother's Day. The legislation is laudable and Democrats and the Clinton administration should join Sen. Metzenbaum and get behind it.

Adoption isn't a panacea for abortion or child abuse or foster care. But a more aggressive pro-adoption policy, involving both the public and private sectors, would help. (The youngest of our three children is a seven-year-old—as of yesterday—adopted daughter from Korea, so absolutely nothing in this column is dispassionate.) The House bill, led by House Rules Committee Chairman Gerald Solomon (an adoptee), Rep. Susan Molinari and Rep. Clay Shaw, proposes a \$5,000 tax credit to help defray adoption expenses. Adoption can be prohibitively expensive; the National Council of Adoption figures the average cost of a do-

mestic adoption is \$20,000.

This has made it impossible for many middle class parents to adopt. Under the House bill, tax write-offs would be available for incomes up to \$115,000; in addition there would be an income tax exclusion for employer-provided adoption benefits. This provision is relatively cheap, costing the federal treasury less than \$2 billion over seven years, and has only one flaw: It isn't refundable. That's a retreat from the Republicans' Contract With America. Refundability ought to be restored to facilitate adoption for some lower-middle income families.

The most emotional provision concerns transracial adoption. This would prohibit states or anyone receiving federal assistance from discriminating against prospective parents because of race. If everything else is equal, preference may be given on the basis of race, but adoption agencies would not be allowed to delay the placement of a child for reasons of "racial matching."

The need here is clear. Of the almost half-million kids in foster care, about one-third are African-American and, on average, they wait for adoption more than twice as long. A University of California at Berkeley study found that 42% of African-American children wait more than four years to be adopted but only 17% of white children wait that long.

This is a conscious policy of many black social workers, who have assailed interracial adoption as "racial and cultural genocide." Sen. Metzenbaum, with the support of President Clinton, moved to change this in the last Congress. But despite denials by the Department of Health and Human Services, he says that agency "pulled the rug out from under my bill."

The politics of adoption unfortunately get twisted. Too many liberals, in particular, have a blind spot. One reason is abortion. Some pro-choice advocates mistakenly see adoption advocacy as undercut-

ting them. "This is an issue that should unite both sides of the abortion debate," correctly argues Rep. Molinari, who is pro-choice. In his 1992 acceptance speech at the Democratic Convention, Bill Clinton promised to make abortion "safe, legal and rare." One small way to make it rarer is to facilitate adoption.

A more fundamental problem may be an ideological attachment to the landmark

Children in Jeopardy

	CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE	CHILDREN ADOPTED FROM FOSTER CARE	CHILD ABUSE FATALITIES
1985	276,000	16,000	810
1993	445,000	18,000	1,166

Sources: Administration for Children and Families (HHS); American Public Welfare Assoc. and the Nat'l Committee to Prevent Child Abuse

1980 Child Welfare Adoption and Assistance Act. This mandates states to make "reasonable efforts" to keep or reunite children with their biological parents under the laudable notion that intact families are better for children.

Unfortunately this well-intended effort may be harming more children than it's helping. Compared to the mid-1980s there are many more children today in foster care, and a much smaller percentage of them are adopted, while reported child abuse is soaring. The files are full of recidivist child abusers, yet as Michael Wald, a law professor and former top HHS official notes, all the research "indicates low levels of success in rehabilitating parents who seriously abuse very young children."

The horror stories are omnipresent. Tuesday's New York Times, for instance, had a front page piece on recriminations following the death of six-year-old Elisa Izquierdo, whose badly beaten body was discovered last November; her mother is charged with the death. Next to that ac-

count is a story about two little children testifying how their mother and father brutalized and killed their four-year-old sister—including beatings, tying her to chairs and burning her with cigarettes and hair curlers.

Eight years ago we had to hospitalize our oldest child. For four days his roommate was a 14-month-old boy who was tossed into a scalding hot tub by his mother's boyfriend because he was crying. The mother, apparently on drugs, visited the little guy only once. Yet in a few days he was slated to go back to that home.

This law needs to be changed. The emphasis on "preserving family" outrages Carol Statuto Bevan, a child welfare and adoption expert: "This risks the safety and welfare of too many children." Instead, she says, the focus should be "on preserving the child's welfare." Such a child-centered approach raises tough issues, especially how to take kids away from abusive parents and make them eligible for adoption. But it needs to be done.

These are issues that President Clinton cares about, and he's actually considering backing the current legislation. And the skepticism that more than a few in the adoption community express about Hillary Clinton is misplaced; in her speeches, her newspaper columns and her recent book she is a strong adoption advocate.

But the Clintons need to be more visible in marshaling support for more public resources (tax breaks and subsidies), reforming the legal system (changing the child welfare and family preservation standards and expediting adoption procedures), improving the private sector (pressure for more expansive employer adoption benefits) and increasing public awareness. It may be impossible in an election year, but here's a terrific idea: Bill Bennett, the conservative Mr. Virtues, and Mrs. Clinton team up to lead a nationwide campaign for adoption.

The Wrong Way to Encourage Adoption

By David S. Liederman

PRESIDENT Clinton is supporting the House Republicans' plan to give a \$5,000 tax credit to many families that adopt a child. In flush times, such a middle-class subsidy might make sense. But today the Government would do much better to

David S. Liederman is executive director of the Child Welfare League of America, an association of public and private groups that place children in foster care and with adoptive families.

use tax dollars to help families that adopt children who are otherwise unlikely to find a permanent home.

Few healthy infants of any race "languish" in foster care. Most are adopted straight from the hospital. So few healthy American infants are available that prospective adoptive parents frequently go abroad to find a child. With infertility on the rise, we don't need tax incentives to encourage people to adopt healthy infants.

But there are 21,000 children with special needs waiting to be adopted, and about 65,000 more are in the care of welfare agencies and awaiting legal clearance to be made available. Most have been placed in foster care because of parental neglect and abuse. Many have serious emotional

A tax credit won't help children who are hard to place.

and physical disabilities. Some have been exposed to drugs or infected with H.I.V. by their mothers. Most are of school age, and many are part of sibling groups that must be adopted together.

Fortunately there are people who want to adopt many of these children — usually the foster parents, nurses and special education teachers who have fallen in love with the children they have been caring for.

But such children, especially those with physical disabilities, are often very expensive to raise. The small state and Federal adoption subsidies do little to offset the costs.

In Ohio, for example, the typical family that adopts a child with special needs has an annual income of less than \$40,000, has several children in the household, and the mother works at least part time. The average monthly adoption subsidy for such families in Ohio is only \$250.

The Government should use the \$1.7 billion that the tax-credit plan would cost over the next seven years to help families that adopt children with special needs. This would mean increasing their monthly adoption subsidies, guaranteeing health coverage for as

long as the child needs it and training services like day care transportation.

The Government could spend a lot more money on these children, and it would still be cheaper than keeping them in foster care. In 1993, the average monthly subsidy for a child in foster care was \$468, while the average adoption assistance payment nationwide was only \$292.

The Government should also encourage adoption of children with special needs by running public-service announcements, counseling good foster parents and helping churches and other community groups find suitable families among their members.

A simple tax credit has the advantage of being easily understood by voters. Unfortunately, the problems that children and adoptive families confront are complex. Congress President Clinton deserve praise for their attempt to help adoptive families. Now they should direct Federal aid to the children who need it most. □

Adoption Bill Facing Battle Over Measure On Indians

By ERIC SCHMITT

WASHINGTON, May 7 — When the House this week considers a major adoption bill that President Clinton supports, lawmakers will also consider a very emotional question: Who decides if someone is an American Indian?

The answer carries sweeping consequences not only for the nearly two million Indians nationwide, but also for thousands of non-Indian couples whose ability to adopt Indian children is limited.

At issue is the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act, which says tribal courts, not state ones, have jurisdiction over cases involving the custody of Indian children. The law gives priority to placing Indian children with Indian families whenever possible.

Critics say the tribal courts are interfering in the adoption of children and cite several cases where tribes are trying to reclaim Indian children, sometimes years after adoption.

The adoption bill before the House will exempt custody proceedings from tribal court jurisdiction if they involve children whose parents do not maintain "significant social, cultural or political affiliation with the tribe." The bill does not define what that means.

"The law's original intent was to protect Indian children and culture," said Representative Deborah Pryce, the Ohio Republican who has sponsored the measure, "but over the last 20 years it's been misapplied."

Indian leaders argue that the measure will create a giant loophole that will undermine tribal sovereignty and let state courts, which may have little understanding of Indian culture, decide who is affiliated with a tribe.

"This would be devastating to Indian tribes," said Terry Cross, executive director of the National Indian Child Welfare Association, a tribal welfare group in Portland, Ore.

Conservative groups like the Christian Coalition and the Heritage Foundation, as well as the National Council for Adoption, have lined up behind Ms. Pryce's measure.

President Clinton has endorsed the adoption bill's other provisions, including a tax credit for most adoptive families, but the White House has voiced concern that Ms. Pryce's measure could violate tribes' self-governance.

Moreover, many Republicans are angry that Ms. Pryce and the House leadership inserted the measure into the adoption bill without first holding hearings. Representative Don Young, the Alaska Republican who heads the House Resources Committee, which has jurisdiction over Indian affairs, said he would offer an amendment to kill the provision.

The Indian child welfare law was passed after hundreds of Indian children were removed from their homes by social agencies and put up for adoption in the 1960's and 1970's.

"It was a horrible, shameful practice, what happened then," Ms. Pryce said.

But Ms. Pryce's support for the law soured after she became involved in an adoption case involving two constituents. The adoptive parents, Jim and Colette Rost of Columbus, Ohio, are fighting to retain custody of 3-year-old twin girls, Bridget and Lucy, who are three thirty-second Pomo Indian.

The Rosts adopted the girls from an unmarried couple in Southern California who gave up the twins at birth. But four months after the adoption, the girls' paternal grandmother, with the Pomo tribe's support, said she wanted the children. The Rosts learned belatedly that the girls' father, to speed final placement, had not disclosed his Indian background as the law requires.

In January a California appellate court reversed a lower-court order that the Rosts return the girls. The tribe has appealed to the California Supreme Court, which is to decide by the end of the month whether it will hear the case.

Indian leaders acknowledge that the law has flaws, but they insist that unfortunate cases like the Rosts' are an exception that can be avoided by punishing lawyers and other people who violate the statute.

No agency has kept track of the number of Indian children put up for adoption since the bill became law in 1978, but Mr. Cross estimated that of "thousands" of adoptions, about 40 had been contested. Ms. Pryce said the number of "horror stories" was much higher and often involved cases of children having only minute traces of Indian ancestry.

Each of the nation's 554 Indian tribes sets its own standards for membership and when a person can be enrolled, a prerogative that Indians hold dear.

Henry M. Cagey, chairman of the Lummi nation, a 4,000-member tribe in Washington State, said, "Congresswoman Pryce is listening to a small minority of voices who want to adopt Indian children without consideration of our heritage, traditions and extended families."

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Clinton Backs Tax Credit For Adoption

GOP Bill Is Endorsed; Interracial Placements Could Be Expedited

By Barbara Vobejda
Washington Post Staff Writer

In a letter he will send to House Republican leaders today, President Clinton will endorse Republican legislation that would allow most adoptive families to claim a \$5,000 tax credit and penalize states whose adoption agencies delay placement of a child to find a family of the same race, White House sources said yesterday.

The president will embrace provisions that have traditionally been in the Republican domain. The adoption tax credit was part of the House GOP's "Contract With America," and Republicans have been most vocal in opposing racial matching in adoption placements.

"Promoting adoption is one of the most important things we can do to strengthen American families and give more children what every child in America deserves—loving parents and a healthy home," the president says in his letter, a copy of which was obtained by The Washington Post.

It will be the second time in three days that the president has gotten involved in measures affecting families, a topic likely to play a major role in this year's presidential election. And both times, the president staked out positions likely to alienate some liberals.

On Saturday, he announced he would require states to end welfare payments to teenage parents who refuse to stay in school or to live with a parent or guardian.

In endorsing the adoption bill, Clinton said he "strongly supported" the tax credit—which would be \$5,000 for families earning up to \$75,000 a year. The size of the credit would gradually decline for families earning between \$75,000 and \$115,000; families earning more than \$115,000 would not be eligible for a credit.

Also, he goes further than he has in the past to interject himself directly into the emotional and divisive issue of interracial adoption.

The bill, slated to go to the House floor this week, would prohibit states or adoption agencies from discriminating on the basis of race

See ADOPT, A5, Col. 1

ADOPT, From A1

against families who want to adopt. Agencies could consider race in placing a child if there are two or more qualified families, but may not delay placement while waiting for a parent of the same race.

That language, Clinton says in his letter, is consistent with "my long-standing goal to end the historical bias against interracial adoptions, which too often has meant interminable waits for children to be matched with parents of the same race."

Republicans said they welcome the endorsement, but pointed out that the president had vetoed a welfare bill last year that contained similar language on interracial adoptions.

"We're happy to have it," Rep. Susan Molinari (R-N.Y.) said of the endorsement. "I know he had tentative problems with trans-racial adoptions in the past. . . . I hope this signals to Democrats to join with us."

More than 400,000 children are in the foster care system, about half of whom are minorities. Minority children wait longer to be adopted than do white children, according to studies.

Among children in foster care, only about 21,000 are legally available for adoption, according to the Department of Health and Human Services. And of those, two out of three have "special needs," including emotional or physical disabilities or the need to be placed as part of a sibling group.

Many Republicans and some Democrats, including former senator Howard M. Metzenbaum (D-Ohio), have contended that the policy of race matching has kept thousands of African American children languishing in foster care for years. But social workers say that the high number in foster care stems from the difficulty in placing children with special needs.

Legislation was adopted in 1994

with the intention of banning race matching, but Metzenbaum and others were dissatisfied with Clinton administration regulations interpreting the law because they allowed agencies to consider race. Administration

officials say the law aggressively enforced, reducing the number of states that give an automatic preference to black families in the adoption of black children.

Still, Republicans have pushed for a new law that would ban racial placement outright, essentially establishing a colorblind system that would match children and families without regard to race.

While that was the original language in the bill when it went before

the Ways and Means Committee, it was amended to allow race to be considered when there is more than one qualified family seeking to adopt a child. The bill, which was approved by the committee on a voice vote, would also go further than current law to penalize states that do not comply.

Rep. Charles B. Rangel (D-N.Y.), who has argued vociferously against a "first-come, first-served" approach, said the new language does not change the current law. "The only reason the president's doing all of this is . . . because he wants to make it clear he's not opposed to interracial adoption. . . . But if he feels good saying it, okay."

David Liederman, executive director of the Child Welfare League of America, called the tax credit a "misdirection" of resources in a tight fiscal climate, essentially helping middle-class families while other proposals would cut funding for programs meant to help those willing to adopt special-needs children.

"I would have hoped the president would have spoken to that," Liederman said.

It is estimated the credit would cost the government \$1.7 billion over seven years, and the GOP bill would offset the revenue loss with income gained in enforcing new anti-fraud provisions on foreign trusts and from repeal of a tax exclusion for businesses purchasing energy conservation measures.

THE WASHINGTON POST
MONDAY, MAY 6, 1996

*"The only reason
the president's
doing all of this is
... because he wants
to make it clear he's
not opposed to
interracial
adoption."*

— Rep. Charles B. Rangel (D-N.Y.)

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the First Lady

For Immediate Release

November 13, 1995

**REMARKS BY FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
AT NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH EVENT
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

MRS. CLINTON: Good Afternoon. Thank you. Thank you. Please be seated and please be welcomed to the White House. This is a very special day for all of us. And there have been many very important events that have occurred here in the East Room of the White House, but I honestly don't believe there is any that is more important than what we are doing by celebrating National Adoption Month. And November is a particularly appropriate time to highlight the importance of adoption in this country.

It's hard to believe but Thanksgiving and the Holiday Season are a little more than a week away. And during this season we traditionally focus on family. And we recognize how much we need and depend on the love of our parents and spouses and children and other relatives. So for all of you who are gathered here to begin this celebration, that we hope will ignite a fire of enthusiasm throughout the country about adoption, I want to say thank you.

There are several members of Congress here and I am delighted that all of you could join us. Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, a long time advocate of family and children services is here with us because all of us believe that there isn't anything more important than our families and that the families formed by adoption are special and deserve the support of all the rest of us. Because we want to emphasize that there's a need in our country to bring the richness and love and support and guidance and discipline and attention of family life to every one of America's waiting children.

As we go into the Holiday Season, I hope every American will recognize that there are tens of thousands of children waiting for the love of a mother, a father, a sister, a brother, to have grandparents and aunts and uncles, to have a dog or a cat like Socks. Tens of thousands of those children, every single day, are growing up without mothers or fathers to help teach them, to nurture them and to tell them that they are special. We know

they are, but they need someone in their family to tell them that.

Often when we think of adoption, we have a picture in our mind of infants being welcomed into a family. But adoption today involves children and teenagers of all ages, backgrounds and circumstances. In this room today are adoptive families and waiting children who demonstrate the range of adoptive experiences. Adoption has provided a new beginning for school-aged children, for adolescents, for children with physical and emotional and educational disabilities, children of different races and cultures, and brothers and sisters who want to remain together.

Let me give you a picture of the children in America who are waiting. Six out of ten of them are school-aged children. Four out of ten are white. Four out of ten are African-American. The rest, Hispanic, Native American and every other race and color that you can imagine. Two out of three have special needs. Each one of these children has the capacity to love, to bring new joy and energy into a family. Most of you who are here, the families that already know that, are living proof of how adoption can be successful and emotionally rewarding. But we need more of you.

I recently met with Shane Salter, a young man who grew up in foster care without ever being placed in a permanent family. He described what that meant to him. He talked about his continued longing for parents who would not only care for him but who could be grandparents to his own children. Adoption can change lives, not only of those in the immediate family, but through generations.

I know that adoption in America today can be frustrating and emotionally draining and expensive. A newspaper column I wrote about adoption this summer generated more responses than any other I've written. I meet people throughout the country who come up and say they have read my column and they're an adoptive parent. Or they have read my column and they're a foster parent. Or they read my column, and they were adopted. Prospective parents have written to tell me of the immense obstacles, the red tape, and the costs, particularly the legal costs, that have led them to despair of ever being able to adopt a child.

I want you to know that the President is committed to easing and encouraging the adoption process. And I recently convened a group of experts to discuss how to make the government a better partner, and more responsive to the needs of prospective parents and children. In particular, the administration is working hard to ease the adoption of minority and special-needs children. The President is committed to enforcing the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act which prohibits adoption agencies from denying the placement

of a child solely on the basis of race, color, or national origin of a child or prospective adoptive parents.

The administration also championed -- and the first bill the President signed -- was the Family and Medical Leave Act which ensures that parents can take time off when they adopt a child without fearing the loss of their jobs. And the administration has launched a public education campaign about adoption. A campaign in which I am very honored to participate. These are just some of the many initiatives, both in the government and in the private sector, and in partnership between both the public and private sectors, that are designed to support the placement of children in loving homes.

But all of your efforts and all of the administration's efforts to strengthen our families and children could be jeopardized by actions in Congress. The government currently provides essential recruitment and training services for prospective adoptive parents. As well as subsidies to families who adopt special-needs children, those living with Cerebral Palsy, or HIV, or some other disability, since those children have large medical and educational expenses. Many of the children who are special-needs, when they are adopted into families, bring with them such large medical costs, that if Medicaid is cut back substantially, the medical insurance for many of those special-needs children will no longer be available after they are adopted. Which would be a great tragedy, because there are so many parents who just need a little bit of financial help with the costs. Need a little bit of subsidy but then do need continuing medical help to be able to open their lives to these children. So we must all who care about adoption know that putting our nation's economic house in order does not mean sweeping out compassion and caring for our neediest children and families, making it less likely they will ever have a house of their own.

We have to work together to improve our adoption system. In the Proclamation for National Adoption Month the President said that citizens from all communities and organizations from the public and private sectors must join together to renew our commitment to finding permanent homes for each one of America's children. Two of the private foundations doing this important work are the Ann E. Casey Foundation which is active in five states, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Families For Kids, active in ten states.

I wish we could re-double, re-triple our efforts. I believe that if we really put our minds to it, if we could recruit qualified volunteers out of our judicial system and our legal system and our social work system, to be assigned to each child who is waiting to be adopted. We could make it possible for thousands and thousands more children to be adopted by this time

next year. We have to put our minds to it but there is no more important task than trying to do everything in our power to ensure that every child has a family.

Perhaps no person has been a more effective advocate for children waiting to be adopted, than our next speaker. The founder of Wendy's, the star of T.V., Dave Thomas started speaking out on adoption in 1990 when he became the national spokesperson for the White House Initiative on Adoption. As an adopted child himself, he says he would not have become the successful father, husband and businessman he is today, had he not been able to grow up in a supportive family.

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption seeks to make adoption more affordable, streamline the adoption process, and educate the public about the potential joys of adoption. Mr. Thomas believes that no child is unadoptable and every child deserves a home and a loving family. But he knows, as we all do, that we have to overcome some misconceptions about adoption. We have to make it very clear that the children who are waiting are children just like yours and mine and every other child who goes to school and plays in playgrounds. They are America's children. And we have to make it clear to America that they would benefit greatly from having one of these children in their lives.

Mr. Thomas has also been a leader in the campaign to encourage corporations to extend maternity benefits to adoptive parents. This is so important. We do a terrible job in our country of ensuring maternity benefits in nearly every instance in most of the businesses in our country. It's important for new parents to be able to spend time with that child. Think how important it is for a new child coming into a strange home, filled with anticipation to have some time where he is the center of that family's attention, and that at least one parent gets a chance to spend that time with the child.

Within Wendy's, adoption benefits are paid leave and financial assistance with adoption costs. Available to employees who have been with the company for at least one year. All of us are very proud of Mr. Thomas' leadership and grateful to him for it.

Following him to the podium will be the Reverend Wayne Thompson, President of One Church-One Child. This is one of the great ideas in America. And I wish every church would join One Church-One Child. Because through One Church-One Child, we have seen literally hundreds of thousands of children being given homes who might otherwise not have been known to anyone. And the church serves as a back-up extended family for the members who adopt children. Through this work, thousands of African-American children have found loving homes and supportive church congregations.

You will also be hearing from the Marshall Family. The proud parents of two beautiful little girls, they have experienced so much love and happiness with their two daughters, that they have spent considerable time promoting adoption in their own community. In fact, they are the family featured in the posters supporting adoption that appear in Wendy's restaurants around the world.

And then finally, we will hear from a young woman who knows exactly what's at stake. Deanna is 13. She lived in a foster home for seven years before moving into a group home in Topeka, Kansas. Though she no longer lives with her two foster sisters, she is still close to them and she is still waiting. She is a cheerleader, an avid reader, and a budding poet -- and a lovely young woman based on my experience with her a few minutes ago.

So these people who will be speaking to you have the experience that we would like to see transmitted to every American. They know what it's like to form a family by choice. To be able to say, I choose you to be my son or daughter. And in return to know what it's like as a child to have the love and support that can only come from one's own family. So please join me in welcoming Mr. Dave Thomas."

Dave Thomas: "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I thank you Mrs. Clinton. I asked Mrs. Clinton about, something like about a year ago, if she would help. And she said, "I will." And that's the reason why we're here today so I just want everyone to know that Mrs. Clinton and the President are dedicated to adoption. So let's give them a big hand, because they did it.

Let me tell you why I'm interested in adoption. I was adopted as Mrs. Clinton said, and my mother, my foster mother died when I was about five years old. And I was born out of wedlock and I had nothing to do with it -- trust me. And I had nothing to do about being adopted, it wasn't my fault. But I was adopted and I had six, no not six, I had three more foster mothers and step-mothers and then I left when I was 15 years old. But I do know how important it is, a family. And all through my life I've always been envious of mothers and fathers. Because I've never seen my mother and father. And if you have never seen your mother and father and the nurturing, you know everyone deserves the love and nurturing, when you grow up. I never had it, and I've always been kind of jealous of it.

And my kids, I have five children, fourteen grandchildren, and I probably spoil them for that reason. Now whether that's good or bad, but it's one of the things that, I wasn't spoiled. But I know one thing, I did have a grandmother that did care for

me. She was my foster grandmother and I didn't find out until I was 13 years old that I was adopted, and I was really hurt. So I do know how important it is and I feel so sorry for these children today, in particular, parents who don't take care of their children. I mean I just think it's a crime. I think we need to have an education to educate these parents about responsibility. I don't know how you feel about it but I'm real strong on responsibility.

You know, in foster care, there is almost a half-million children in foster care right now. And there's about 100,000 waiting to be adopted. And when we started the foundation, we said, well, we need to have some goals. And our objective was to make adoption affordable and take the red tape out of adoption, and so that's what we've really been trying to do. And so the first thing we did, we put adoption benefits right with the maternity benefits. And I want everybody to understand it's kind of a no-brainer. If you have maternity benefits, add adoption benefits. And we've done that--

I'm even trying to get the federal government to do the same. Right Mrs. Clinton? Mrs. Clinton said she's going support me. Congressmen? -- Women? -- Senators? Don't forget now, because it's really important. But right now we have, in about thirty-five states, we have adoption benefits. And in cities and in corporations. We wrote all kinds of letters and it's really the right thing to do. We have not said how much, but just to help.

And we also have a bill in the Congress to a tax-credit. And I think it's something for -- adoption is expensive. And we need to help people to adopt as Mrs. Clinton said. And I hope this bill -- Debby -- is going to work out real well. I hope everybody supports it because it's really an important thing.

And then, I think that the next thing that we've been working on, is that we've tried something that we call a computer. Does everybody understand what computers are? And Jan Heffner is the Director of the Dave Thomas Foundation -- stand up Jan -- Jan has been working on this real, real hard.

You know what it is, it's really children with willing parents. Now the children need to be matched with willing parents. And what's happened is IBM, AT&T and Marriot have helped with some government agencies working to make this happen. And the first example case of adoption's waiting children on-line through the National Adoption Center, there was 100,000 inquiries. Am I right Jan? Over 100,000. So Internet is really something that we're really trying to work on.

We're trying to do everything we can to make it possible and remind people about adoption. Because, what happens, these kids are out there, and they go from foster home to foster home. I was in Chicago not too long ago and a little boy, six years old, was in sixteen foster homes. Can you imagine that? I mean that's not fair. So that's what we're really trying to do and if we can get the federal government -- that would really be a good example to put in for all the federal workers adoption benefits. Don't you think so?"

Mrs. Clinton: "I do."

Dave Thomas: "So, I'd just like to say this, I'd like to just say this. I think this is really a great event. I think it's something that we need to work on. And the more awareness and the more we talk about it. And I just keep talking about, and some people like to listen to me and some don't. But I'm going to keep talking because that -- every boy and every girl deserves a loving family. So thank you, and god bless you."

Wayne Thompson: "Thank you Mrs. Clinton for the opportunity to be a part of this historic day, and for your help in raising the awareness of the need for adoptions in our nation. The importance of adoption of children throughout our country can never be overstated. For these children are fortunate enough to have loving, permanent homes, in which they have been nurtured and cared for. They're led into adulthood with the support of parents which every child is entitled to and every child requires.

The family values are embodied by those parents who choose to bring children into their families and experience the joys of parenthood. The mission of the National One Church-One Child is to challenge each and every African-American congregation to adopt one African-American child. We believe that this furthers our need in our community for taking responsibility for our children. Believe me, this plan works.

In our church, we have had over sixteen adoptions since my involvement in this worthwhile program. In fact, there's one little boy who thinks he's pastor. When he was adopted I noticed that -- I always go to the door to greet the members as they leave -- I noticed that my line was shorter than usual, and I became a little bit concerned. I looked around and saw him shaking hands. And he had been adopted by a single-parent, a young woman who was an accountant; so I went over to him and I said, 'Now listen, there are some ground rules in this church. I'm the pastor -- and I shake everybody's hands so if you want to shake hands, come stand by me.' Well the brightness of his eyes

told the whole story. That where he had had no friends, no extended family, no church home, he was rejoicing, because now he had a new family and new friends.

We've had enormous success in placing children in our community in much needed adoptive homes. Many families, however, cannot adopt children without the help of the federal guarantee of financial assistance for every child and especially for special-needs children. This includes the children with Downs Syndrome and Cerebral Palsy and HIV AIDS and crack-cocaine addictive. These children are important too. And children are important to god and so our mission is one that we feel that we must continue to fight until the battle has been won.

The average family could not accept the responsibility for these children without the federal guarantee of financial assistance that is currently provided. This guarantee enables these families to care for children who would otherwise languish in the foster care system. And we are aware that there are welfare reform proposals that are pending now in Congress that would eliminate this much needed guarantee. And so our aim, and our struggle continues as we sound the alarm throughout our communities and from our pulpits, that there are children who are needed to be adopted, but that the government needs to accept the partnership which we offer. We offer it willingly. We offer it gladly.

Two out of three children who are waiting for adoption in this country have special-needs, making this federal guarantee more essential than ever before. In the history of One Church-One Child, since 1980, more than 90,000 children have found homes through our congregations across this nation.

We thank god for the vision of Father Clemence many years ago and we thank you, Mrs. Clinton, for the vision you've cast forth today, because with your support and the support of those who represent and make up our government, we know that the prayers of the righteous will be answered. And so we offer, in this partnership consortium, the prayers of many people who want children to have permanent loving homes. Many pastors who work in our programs have themselves, like me, become adoptive parents and so we know that we practice what we preach. And we know that the children are the ones who get the blessing.

Again, thank you for making this a special day for children across this nation. We know that they long and deserve permanent, loving homes. And so that the need for further guaranteed federal protection most come and we believe with the help of god it will come. Thank you."

Mrs. Marshall: "First of all, I'd like to thank Mrs. Clinton, Mr. Thomas and all others involved, for inviting my family to be a part of this special event for a very important issue.

First of all, I would like to say that if only everyone out there knew, how much joy and happiness Kayla and Terry have brought into me and my husband's life, everyone would be lined up at all adoption agencies everywhere to adopt a child.

My husband and I have been married for 12 years. After being married 9 years, we decided we wanted children. I went to the doctor and found out that I wasn't able to have children. I used to always watch a local spot on our local news program called, 'Wednesday's Child'. They highlight on children that are up for adoption and need homes. So we decided to call Franklin County Children's Services and see how we could go through the adoption process.

They invited us to an adoption party in April of 1992. We were there for about an hour and there were hundreds of kids there from the ages of new-born to 7 years of age. We were there and we played with kids, we made balloons, we jumped rope and then all of a sudden, a little girl comes in. She was late. She came in and she had her little friend's hand and I looked at my husband and I said, 'Look at those jaws, I just love her.' When I first saw her, we knew that she was the one.

She talked to us at lunch, she asked for our fruit that we didn't want. She wasn't shy at all. And so we knew that she was the one and we called the next day and said that we wanted to start our class immediately, we wanted to get her as soon as possible. After we adopted Terry, she wanted sisters and brothers and so we said, 'Hey, we're willing to go and adopt another.' So then, Kayla comes into our life and there's not a day that doesn't go by that she just makes us smile and laugh so much. And if we had room in our home we would adopt 1,000 kids, no matter what race, what religion, color. We just love kids, because children are our future.

I remember when one day we didn't have kids, back when we didn't have kids, we adopted 15 children, nieces, nephews, neighbors' kids, and we went to the Ice Capades. We took up a whole row. We came back to our one bedroom apartment, we threw a big pajama party for 15 children. So, I mean, if we had room, we would adopt more, but we don't have the room in our home but we do have the room in our hearts. And we would like to let the kids know that are waiting for families and homes to keep the faith and with a little bit of help, hope and prayer, you'll all have a family and a home some day. Thank you."

Deanna Moppin: "My name is Deanna Lee Moppin. I have been in SRS custody ever since I was five years old. I was removed from my birth home because of sexual abuse. I was then placed in a new home where I remained for seven years, but then we seemed to have some problems so I was removed from that home along with two other of the girls that were in there.

We were placed in a shelter in Topeka, Kansas where we remained for a few nights before moving on to the villages. In the villages, I have two foster parents and there are nine other kids living with me. The foster parents try to help us feel good about ourselves and they try to help us with our problems and they do the best to find us all good homes that we will happy in.

Some of the kids have nowhere to go, so they just have to keep putting one foot in front of the other and hope for the best while making goals for themselves until they reach their destination.

For most of them their destination is adoption. It is also one of mine. The reasons that I want to get adopted is usually if I want to go to the movies, I have to ask my house parents and they have to ask my village social worker who has to ask my social worker -- and then it has to come back the same way. That usually takes awhile. And if I want clothes, I have to ask my house parents who have to ask my village social worker who has to ask my social worker. There is also paper work that needs to be done and that usually takes up to about three weeks.

The other reasons that I want to be adopted is I would have a place that I could call home. I would have a room that I could call my room. I would have a family that I could love and would love me back.

I wrote a poem about waiting for a home and I would like to share it with you now:

My nerves cringe with excitement as I must wait.
I don't know when it will happen, there is no date.

My one wish that I hope to come true.
Will you make my wish come true, will you?

I don't want to be here forever, I want a home.
Please get me out of this system and out of this dome.

Does anyone want me; it feels like three whole years.
I am still waiting for you, I'm so close to tears.

I want to live happy with my spirit so free.
Only you can make it happen; when will it be?

The papers are here, you have finally heard.
I'd fly to you now if I were a bird.

One question left; Do we make a pair?
Are you somebody who will really care?

I hope you're the one for other choices have come.
I'll go through them all for my choice should not be dumb.

I've always been hoping for this day to arrive.
Without a good family I could not survive.

My nerves boil with excitement I no longer wait.
I know when it will happen and I do know the date.

Mrs. Clinton: "I want to thank everyone who's here and all of the participants. I want to invite all of you into the State Dining Room where there will be a reception and some cookies and things for all of the children who have demonstrated extraordinary patience this afternoon. I just want to end with something that really, I think, echoes what everyone said. The primary responsibility for children lies with the parents and parents have the highest obligation to their own children and should do everything in their power to take care of those children. But sometimes for a lot of reasons that go back to the beginning of human history, that responsibility is not accepted. And then all the rest of us, I think, have the responsibility. We are a part of every child's family whether we acknowledge it or not. And so in any way that we can, we should try to accept that responsibility and give the love and attention that every child who was born deserves to have. And so that's what we hope the result of this National Adoption Month campaign will lead to -- more and more Americans accepting responsibility for all our children. Thank you very much."

tody decisions must be made. Regardless of individual feelings, everyone involved in the process, especially a parent, has an obligation to temper the pain children will inevitably experience.

Anyone who has raised children knows how attached they are to the security of routine. Long after divorce, they usually harbor hopes that their parents will reconcile. The anxieties that come with divorce require that parents do whatever they can to avoid creating additional uncertainty. Parents need to remember that little things often matter most—maintaining mealtimes, helping with homework, telling bedtime stories, taking weekend excursions, praying together. Children's needs must come first.

In deference to their children's feelings of shock, abandonment, and insecurity, adults have to control their own feelings, whether they are relieved and pleased at leaving a marriage, or angry and resentful at being left. This requires a degree of awareness and self-control that can be hard to muster in the midst of so traumatic an event.

Simple acts of decency and civility may be most important: Refusing to criticize the other parent to a child. Providing a decent level of child support, because your child deserves to be taken care of financially, regardless of your feelings about your former spouse. Honoring the times you promise to spend with your child. Using that time to become involved with your child's life, whether by attending sports events, volunteering at school, or simply sitting together talking. Making the effort to celebrate birthdays and holidays and attend school performances. Sparing your child adult disagreements.

As a lawyer, I handled my share of divorce cases and

tried my hardest to keep the parties out of court by working to help them solve their disagreements. Time and again I saw otherwise rational adults, twisted by revenge, jealousy, or greed, attempting to use their children as bargaining chips. Watching one parent browbeat the other over child support or property division by threatening to fight for custody or withhold visitation, I often wished I could call in King Solomon to arbitrate.

That wise king, faced with two women who both claimed to be the mother of a child, ordered that the child be cut in two, so each could receive half the body. The woman who cried out that Solomon should give the child to the other, rather than kill him, revealed herself as the real mother by placing the child's welfare above the contest over his custody. How I wish that all modern-day parents, divorce lawyers, and judges would put so high a priority on determining a child's best interests.

There are signs of hope, however. Some courts now require that divorcing parents attend classes to learn about the potential effects of divorce on their children. They are given training in ways of keeping their children out of marital conflict, opening up lines of communication, and arranging for parenting to continue in a loving and supportive manner.

I admire the way the Parent Education Program in Columbus, Ohio, treats divorce as a public health issue, "because it constitutes a major life stress for 40 percent of American children and can put many of these children at risk for long-lasting difficulties that can derail their development." Twenty-three states have already established voluntary child custody mediation programs, and four more require mediation through statewide programs.

In Michigan, the Friend of the Court system investigates and makes recommendations on custody, visitation, and support in all domestic relations matters, including divorce. The total population of Michigan is only about 4 percent of the nation's, yet that one state repeatedly collects more child support than any other—10 percent of the nation's total in 1993. At the same time, the state strictly enforces visitation rights, in line with its philosophy of treating "the non-custodial parents as more than simply a billfold."

It is incumbent on the village—friends, teachers, mediators, counselors, and ministers, among others—to advocate for children during and after divorce, especially when parents cannot or will not be there for them. Adults beyond the immediate family reached out to my mother, giving her enough support to make it through a difficult childhood. Similarly, the Louisiana teenager who wrote to me found a male role model in a friend of the family.

A long-term study of children in Hawaii examined why some children from poor and broken homes were resilient in the face of adversity while others were not. The study found that resilience depended on many factors, key among them the dependability of the adults in the child's life and the social supports available to the family.

Although children's relationships with parents, particularly their mothers, were found to be especially important, relationships with siblings, grandparents, other adult caregivers, teachers, ministers, and neighbors were significant too. The study reported that positive changes in behavior and attitudes were possible even after early childhood, "if the older child or adolescent encounters

new experiences and people who give meaning to one's life, and a reason for commitment and caring."

Anyone can provide that reason for commitment and caring, as long as he or she is stable and devoted to the best interests of the child. When a parent needs help, individuals in the village can pull a child into their embrace and provide guidance and support, informally or through organizations like Big Brothers/Big Sisters or Boy and Girl Scouts.

In the terrible times when no adequate parenting is available and the village itself must act in place of parents, it accepts those responsibilities in all our names through the authority we vest in government. That means our city, county, and state social welfare services are not only the province of their employees. They intervene in families to protect children on our behalf. And by any fair assessment of our foster care and adoption system, we are not doing a good job taking care of our children.

Approximately 450,000 children are in our foster care system at any given time, and close to 100,000 of them will not be reunited with their families. Too many children are in limbo for far too long. There are not enough qualified foster parents to go around, and those who are available are frequently discouraged from forming warm attachments with children whose futures are still uncertain. Caseworkers are overwhelmed by the numbers of children for whom they are responsible and by the severity of the emotional and physical damage many have suffered.

Loving adults are eager to offer permanent homes to many of these children. But the American adoption process can be a nightmare of complex regulations,

outdated assumptions, and institutional inertia. Public adoptions can take years, and private adoptions may be too costly for many to afford. One woman wrote to tell me how she and her husband, both musicians, had spent thousands of dollars adopting a little boy who is "the joy of our life." When her cousin's teenage daughter recently became pregnant and could not afford to keep her child, the same couple volunteered to adopt again. As simple as this case should have been—the parents and baby being members of the same extended family and all parties agreeing to the adoption—it still cost upward of \$4,000 because of legal fees and paperwork.

For others, there is the shadow of fear cast by uncommon but highly publicized cases in which birth parents sue to reverse an adoption. A forty-year-old newscaster I met in New Mexico wanted to adopt but was discouraged by notorious cases like that of Baby Richard, in which a child lived happily with his adoptive parents until his birth father won custody of him a few years later. However rare they are, such cases undermine people's faith in our adoption system and encourage them to look to other countries for children, while so many of our own country's children go without proper care or love. At an event in the East Room of the White House promoting National Adoption Month, thirteen-year-old Deanna Moppin spoke eloquently about the longings of these children: "I would have a place that I would call home. I would have a room that I would call my room. I would have a family that I could love and would love me back."

Adoption in America is also made more difficult because of a historical bias against interracial adoptions,

which can mean interminable waiting until children are matched with parents of the same race. Although many adopting parents would prefer to bring up children who share their own cultural and racial identity, many others do not have a preference and would gladly take a child of a different background. Today, despite heroic efforts by groups like One Church, One Child, there are far more minority children needing homes than there are same-race homes for them. To prevent these children from languishing in foster care, my husband signed legislation and ordered that new guidelines be put in place to prohibit federally funded agencies from using race as the sole deciding factor in placing children.

The village can take it further. We could set a goal of reducing our foster care and adoption rolls by 100,000 children each year for the next five years by moving children either back home or into adoptive families, whichever is in their best interests. We could be willing to terminate parental rights more quickly whenever physical or sexual abuse is involved. We could recruit qualified citizens to share with overworked social workers, lawyers, and judges the burden of moving children's cases through the courts. We could make decisions by birth parents to give up children for adoption more difficult to overturn, especially when a child has already become strongly attached to an adoptive family. We could ensure that government continues to cover some of the costs associated with adoption. We could enlist more businesses to follow the leadership of Wendy's president Dave Thomas, who has been vocal about businesses subsidizing adoption costs as well. In these and other ways, we can see to it that considerations like regulations, money,

skin color, and even parental rights and adult prerogatives take a back seat to the love and security children so deeply need.

Discussions of modern families often miss the point. Although the nuclear family, consisting of an adult mother and father and the children to whom they are biologically related, has proved to be the most durable and effective means of meeting children's needs over time, it is not the only form that has worked in the past or the present. I know many successful adults, like my mother and my husband, who were raised in families that did not fit the conventional mold. Others I know thrived in the care of biological and adoptive surrogates, and even in foster care or institutions. What a family looks like to outsiders is not as important as whether adults know what children need to develop positively, and work to fulfill their responsibilities to each other and to their children.

In addition, however, every society requires a critical mass of families that fit the traditional ideal, both to meet the needs of most children and to serve as a model for other adults who are raising children in difficult settings. We are at risk of losing that critical mass in America today. Parenting has never been easy, but today, when most adults consciously choose to become mothers and fathers, we owe an even higher degree of love and respect to the children we bring into this world.

Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of the families we grew up in, we get a second chance at domestic happiness when we create a family of our own. Bill and I have watched with joy as Roger and his wife, Molly, and my brother Tony and his wife, Nicole, have joined us in parenthood. We've been impressed with the willingness

our brothers have shown to participate in the daily tasks of child care, and particularly with Roger, who learned by negative example the importance of a father's influence on a son's life. Every parent makes mistakes, sometimes serious ones. But if we find mediating influences along the way, as Roger found in his mother, brother, extended family, and wife, we can learn even from the painful lessons our upbringing has to teach us.

Those of us who work hard enough—and are lucky enough—to create a flourishing family life have a bounty of joy and security to share with others less fortunate. By extending our good fortune, we create a village that acknowledges children as our first allegiance and strives to ensure that every child has at least one champion.

Talking It Over

By Hillary Rodham Clinton

Let's Make Adoption Easier, Less Costly

The first time I met Mother Teresa was not in an urban slum or a remote village in India but in the fancy ballroom of a Washington hotel. It was February, 1994, and she had just delivered a speech against abortion at the National Prayer Breakfast. When she finished her remarks, she pulled me aside for a chat.

She told me about her homes for orphaned children in New Delhi and Calcutta and asked for my help in setting up a similar home for abandoned and neglected babies in Washington. I agreed to work on the project. Although we differ on some issues, we found common ground on adoption. So we sat and talked about how to find homes for the hundreds of thousands of American children who need loving families.

A year later, my daughter and I visited Mother Teresa's home for children in New Delhi. There were too many cribs and too few toilets, and there was too little space. There was no way the place could ever pass inspection in any American city. But there were also dozens of beautiful babies, mostly girls, being fed, clothed, sheltered and loved until they could be adopted.

These images stayed with me when I returned home. I was even more determined to help Mother Teresa bring to Washington the compassion I had witnessed in India. But you cannot imagine how much red tape was getting in my way. Ironically, many regulations designed to protect children often overlook what kids need most: love and attention.

Finally, on a sweltering day this past June, the Mother Teresa Home for Children opened in an affluent residential neighborhood of the nation's capital. It is a two-story Tudor house with a swimming pool in the back yard, donated by a remarkably generous person who chose to remain anonymous. At the dedication ceremony, Mother Teresa walked me through brightly painted rooms filled with cribs, bassinets and stuffed animals.

Although it will accommodate only eight children, this home is a crucial step in awakening Americans to the crisis of adoption.

We should worry less about how many cribs can be placed in a room and more about how many children can be placed with loving families. And instead of yelling at one another about abortion, we should spend our energy making adoptions easier. If that were to happen, there would be far fewer abortions and far more children in happy homes.

Today, there are about 450,000 children in the United States who need permanent families. There are tens of thousands of parents seeking to adopt. Yet every day, complex regulations, outdated assumptions and wrong-headed laws stand in the way of bringing these parents and children together.

For some Americans, such as a woman who wrote to me recently, cost is the biggest barrier. She and her husband, both musicians, spent thousands of dollars adopting a little boy six years ago. When her cousin's daughter recently became pregnant at age 18 and could not afford to keep the child, the same couple volunteered to adopt again. As simple as this case should have been—the parents and baby were members of the same extended family and all parties agreed to the adoption—it still cost upward of \$4,000 because of legal fees and paper work.

For others, there is a fear factor. A 40-year-old newscaster I met recently in New Mexico was interested in adopting but was discouraged by highly publicized cases such as Baby Richard's, in which birth parents seek to reclaim custody of adopted children.

Decisions to give up children for adoption should be difficult to overturn; the decision to return the child to the biological parents or to uphold the adoption should be made as quickly as possible. No child should be left in limbo.

The process also is made more difficult because of a historical bias against interracial adoptions, which can mean endless waiting until children are matched with parents of the same race.

Today, there are far more minority children needing homes than are being placed for adoption. To prevent these children from languishing in foster care, new guidelines are now in place that will prohibit federally funded agencies from using race as a factor in placing children.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we did something dramatic about adoption? Why not set a goal of placing 100,000 children each year for the next five years? To do this, we would have to make adoption easier and enlist volunteer lawyers and judges to speed up the legal process. And we should also follow Mother Teresa's model, in which considerations such as money, regulations and skin color do not outweigh the more important gift of love.

TALKING IT OVER**BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON****RELEASE: WEEKEND, OCTOBER 28-29, 1995**

When I first began writing this column more than three months ago, I hoped to occasionally use this space to respond to the many people who write to me.

So far, I have received more heartwarming and thought-provoking letters than I can count. I also have received a few angry letters whose contents cannot be published in a family newspaper.

I've heard from a class of second- and third-graders in Kansas who are concerned about pollution, a man from Illinois who is campaigning against tobacco use, and a retiree in Florida worried about the high cost of health care.

A boy from Texas wanted to know what Socks eats (dried cat food) and a 10-year-old in Minnesota asked how many rooms are in the White House (132).

I wish I could respond to all of these letters in this column. Instead, I can only answer a few.

Many readers wrote in response to my column in July about our nation's complicated system of adoption and the thousands of needy children who are waiting for permanent, loving homes. Not surprisingly, I heard from lots of people who said they were eager to adopt children but had become overwhelmed by the long wait, red tape and high cost involved.

A Florida woman, frustrated by a lack of communication among adoption agencies and government social workers, summed up the feelings of many prospective adoptive parents: "I know there is a little girl in this country somewhere waiting for my home."

One couple from Oregon, trying to adopt through a county agency, was told that it might take several years before a child was available. Their alternative, to adopt through a private agency, could cost \$16,000 or more.

Because these problems are so widespread -- and because so many children continue to languish in foster care -- I recently got together a group of experts, adoption advocates and concerned parents to help people learn more about adoption and to make the process simpler and more efficient for waiting parents. There is no reason so many loving parents cannot be united with children desperate for their care and attention.

I also have received mailbags of letters about my trip to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September. Some people were

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON 10/28-29/95

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concerned about my participation, and many others were enthusiastic about it. A few expressed their outrage over infanticide and coerced abortions in China, problems that people became more aware of because the conference was held there. Others wondered if the conference would really make a difference in improving women's rights around the world.

I believe the conference was an important and historic first step in giving women the tools they need to lead productive lives. More than 180 nations agreed for the first time that women are integral to the economic, political and social life of every country and that global peace and prosperity depend on the well-being of women.

However, the conference in Beijing will only be a lasting success if governments, institutions and each of us in our own lives work to ensure that women are full and equal partners in society. Here at home, for example, the President has created a special White House Council on Women that will enable government agencies to work together and reach out to private organizations to fulfill the goals of the women's conference.

Health issues were on the minds of many readers. I heard from scores of Gulf War veterans and their families, who were concerned about the government's response to illnesses commonly referred to as Gulf War Syndrome. I hope those families, many of whom have suffered greatly, know that the President has established an advisory committee to investigate Gulf War veterans' illnesses.

Perhaps the most gratifying health-related letter I received came from Miriam Murtha, a Virginia woman who got a mammogram as a result of our breast cancer awareness campaign that began earlier this year. Her screening found two malignant tumors before they could spread to other parts of her body. "I will be having regular checkups from now on," she wrote.

Children also wrote to me with suggestions and questions. Many wondered if I could raise their allowances, lower the voting age or send them free tickets to Washington. (Sorry, I can't.)

And quite a few offered their own editorial comments. "I think there should be no more drugs. I don't want any more guns and no more pollution," wrote Brandon Jackson, a second-grader from Kansas.

To Brandon and everyone else who wrote to me over these last few months, thanks for talking things over with me.

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**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
TALKING POINTS FOR MOTHER'S DAY ADOPTION EVENT
THE ROOSEVELT ROOM
MAY 10, 1996**

- Welcome to the White House. I'm so glad you could join me today in honor of Mother's Day to talk about the joys and challenges of adoption.
- Mother's Day is a wonderful time to remember that each of you have given the most important gift an adult can give to a child -- loving parents and a healthy, stable home. And I know they have given you all of the rewards and richness that come with raising children.
- Often when we think of adoption, we have a picture in our mind of infants being welcomed into a family. But adoption today involves children and teenagers of all ages, backgrounds and circumstances. Adoption has provided a new beginning for school-aged children, for adolescents, for children with physical and emotional disabilities, for children of different races and cultures, and for brothers and sisters who want to stay together. As I look around the room, I see families that represent the range of adoptive experiences. You are living proof that adoption can be successful and emotionally rewarding. We need more of you.
- Far too many children are waiting for permanent homes. Almost half of these children have been waiting more than two years. More than half have special medical, developmental, behavioral or psychological needs. They are minority children, older children and siblings.
- In November, we celebrated National Adoption Month at the White House by highlighting the waiting children and the importance finding them permanent homes through adoption. These children deserve what your children have. That's why the President and I are committed to encouraging and easing the adoption process.
- The Administration has worked hard to promote adoption, especially for children with special needs. We championed the Family and Medical Leave Act -- which enables parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or their health insurance. We launched a public education campaign about adoption. We strongly supported and remain committed to enforcing vigorously the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act to end discrimination based on race or ethnicity in adoptions. We have increased by 60 percent the number of children with special needs who have been adopted with Federal adoption assistance. We have voiced our strong support for a bill in Congress right now that would give a tax credit to families wanting to adopt. And we have created an honor roll of private companies who have pledged to make adoption easier for workers and their families by paying adoption benefits, offering leave time after adoption, or other programs.

- But we need to do more. We should redouble our efforts. We should make it possible for thousands and thousands more children to be adopted by Mother's Day next year. Because there is no more important task than trying to do everything in our power to ensure that every child has a family.
- [OPEN DISCUSSION.]

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Mr. Vander Velde

HRC

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

July 30, 1996

MEMORANDUM

TO: Meeting Participants

FROM: Nicole Rabner
Office of the First Lady

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in the meeting on adoption issues with First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton. Enclosed is a briefing book, containing an agenda for the meeting, as well as background information on the participants and the organizations they represent.

Please arrive at the North West Gate of the White House, located on Pennsylvania Avenue, at 9:15 am (enclosed also is a map for reference). Please be sure to bring photo identification with you for security clearance purposes.

The meeting will take place in the Roosevelt Room, which is located in the West Wing of the White House. From the North West Gate, you will be directed to the West Lobby, where you will be escorted to the Roosevelt Room. We expect the meeting to conclude by noon.

We look forward to seeing you on Friday. Please do not hesitate to call me at 202/456-6266 with any questions.

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Meeting on Adoption Issues
Friday, August 2, 1996
The White House

AGENDA

- I. Welcome and Remarks**
Overview of Administration Action and Initiatives
First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
- II. Open Discussion on:**
 - 1. Barriers to Adoption/Deficiencies in the Adoption System**
 - 2. Model Programs/Communities**
 - 3. Role of Foundations**
 - 4. Role of Federal Government/Recommendations for Action**
 - 5. Building Partnerships Between the Public and Private Sectors**
- III. Closing Remarks**
First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

**Meeting with Foundation Leaders on Adoption Issues
The White House
August 2, 1996**

List of Participants

Background information on meeting participants follows under specified tabs:

TAB

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A

Divider Title: _____

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton

Biography of Mrs. Clinton

It Takes A Village and Other Lessons Children Teach Us, chapter excerpt

Talking It Over, syndicated column by Mrs. Clinton, selected columns on adoption issues



BIOGRAPHY OF FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

Hillary Rodham Clinton served as First Lady of Arkansas for twelve years. During that time, she worked as a full-time partner of a law firm, chaired an education committee that set public school standards in Arkansas, managed a home, and cared for her husband and child. On many occasions, Hillary Clinton has spoken about the need "to find the right balance in our lives." For her, the elements of that balance are family, work, and public service.

Hillary Diane Rodham was born in Chicago, Illinois, on October 26, 1947, daughter of Dorothy Rodham and the late Hugh Rodham. She and her two younger brothers grew up in Park Ridge, Illinois, as a close-knit family. An excellent student, she was also a Girl Scout and a member of the local Methodist youth group. Hillary enjoyed sports and was always interested in politics.

She entered Wellesley College in 1965. Graduating with high honors, she then enrolled in Yale Law School, where she served on the Board of Editors of the *Yale Review of Law and Social Action*. There she met Bill Clinton, a fellow student. While at Yale, she developed her strong concern for protecting the interests of children and their families.

In 1973, Hillary became a staff attorney for the Children's Defense Fund. A year later, she joined the Impeachment Inquiry staff of the Judiciary Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives to work on the Watergate impeachment proceedings.

Hillary left Washington and "followed her heart to Arkansas." She married Bill Clinton in 1975. The couple both taught on the law faculty of the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. Their daughter, Chelsea, was born in 1980.

As First Lady of Arkansas, Hillary continued to work tirelessly on behalf of children and families. In addition to chairing the Arkansas Education Standards Committee, she founded the Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families. She introduced a pioneering program called Arkansas' Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youth, which trains parents to work with their children in preschool preparedness and literacy. Hillary also served on the board of the Arkansas Children's Hospital. In recognition of her professional and personal accomplishments, Hillary was named Arkansas Woman of the Year in 1983 and Arkansas Mother of the Year in 1984.

Upon taking office, the President made health care one of his highest priorities. He appointed the First Lady to head his Task Force on National Health Care Reform. Like her predecessors, Hillary Rodham Clinton brings to the role of First Lady of the United States her own special talents, experience, style, and interests.

IT TAKES
— A —
VILLAGE

And Other Lessons



Children Teach Us

HILLARY
—
RODHAM
—
CLINTON



Every Child Needs a Champion

*If I could say just one thing to parents, it would be simply
that a child needs someone who believes in him
no matter what he does.*

ALICE KELIHER

MOST OF the people I knew growing up had families remarkably like mine. I did not have a single close friend, from kindergarten through high school, whose parents were divorced. But there was someone I knew very well who was the child of divorce: my mother.

My mother was born in Chicago in 1919, when her mother was only fifteen and her father just seventeen. A sister followed five years later, but both parents were too young for the responsibilities of raising children, and they decided they no longer wished to be married. When my mother was only eight years old and her sister barely three, her father sent them alone by train to Los Angeles to live with his parents, who were immigrants from England.

When my mother first told me how she cared for her sister during the three-day journey, I was incredulous. After I became a mother myself, I was furious that any child, even in the safer 1920s, would be treated like that.

To this day, my mother paints a vivid picture of living in southern California seventy years ago. She describes

drop out of high school, become pregnant as teenagers, abuse drugs, behave violently, become entangled with the law. A parent's remarriage often does not seem to better the odds.

Further, the rise in divorce and out-of-wedlock births has contributed heavily to the tragic increase in the number of American children in poverty, currently one in five. And while divorce often improves the economic condition of men, who are rarely awarded custody, it nearly always results in a decline in the standard of living for the custodial parent—generally the mother—and the children.

The disappearance of fathers from children's daily lives, because of out-of-wedlock births and divorce, has other, less tangible consequences. Girls are more likely to respond with depression and inhibited behavior, whereas boys are more likely to drop out of school and to have academic or behavioral problems. As Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan warned more than thirty years ago, the absence of fathers in the lives of children—especially boys—leads to increased rates of violence and aggressiveness, as well as a general loss of the civilizing influence marriage and responsible parenthood historically provide any society.

A child's prayer is used as the logo for the Children's Defense Fund: "Dear Lord, be good to me. The sea is so wide and my boat is so small." Children without fathers, or whose parents float in and out of their lives after divorce, are the most precarious little boats in the most turbulent seas.

Many who protest loudly against welfare, gay rights, and other perceived threats to "family values" have been uncharacteristically silent about divorce. One does not

have to agree with all the remarks of former Secretary of Education William Bennett to welcome his acknowledgment before the Christian Coalition that divorce is hard on children: "In terms of damage to the children of America, you cannot compare what the homosexual movement . . . has done to what divorce has done to this society. In terms of the consequences to children, it is not even close."

Perhaps the most compelling evidence comes from the mouths of children themselves. I recently received a letter from a fifteen-year-old boy in Louisiana whose parents had divorced. "I've come to distrust you adults and the legal system in this country," he wrote. "It seems to me that you adults do a lot of talking and nothing more." He went on to describe what the breakup is doing to his family, as a unit and as individuals. "I try hard not to become an angry, bitter young man towards my father and the system," he told me. "But it is not fair to me or my mom that she has to be both mother and father to me and my little brother. It makes no sense to me." It should make no sense to any of us.

MY PERSONAL wish, that every child have an intact, dependable family, will likely remain a wish. But there is much we can do to encourage and strengthen marriages and to provide adequate support for children of divorced and single parents. Here are a few examples of what is already happening.

After years of casual attitudes about divorce in this country, heartening efforts are under way to help more couples preserve their marriages. Grassroots campaigns

that urge men to take more responsibility for family well-being are cropping up around the country. Diverse (and sometimes controversial) as they and their leaders are, the popular response they have elicited reflects a broad public concern with the question of personal accountability. Promise Keepers, a nondenominational ministry, has filled football stadiums with men seeking guidance and encouragement to live more ethical lives. The Million Man March on October 16, 1995, filled the Capitol Mall with men who, in a genuine spirit of atonement and reconciliation, expressed their determination to take responsibility for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Seminars in marital reconciliation are thriving in educational and religious organizations throughout the country. In his State of the Union address in 1995, the President recognized the work of the Reverends John and Diana Cherry, two AME Zion ministers from Maryland. Through their sermons and their premarital and marital counseling courses, they have dedicated much of their ministry to helping couples stay together or get back together. Their church has an unusually high male membership because of this direct appeal to men to accept and enjoy family responsibility.

The American Bar Association has initiated a pilot project, the First Year Anniversary Course, which assists new couples in identifying problems most likely to emerge early in a marriage. The course allows couples in crisis to participate in communication and negotiation sessions with lawyers and human relations experts.

The Partners Project, created by Lynne Gold-Bikin, a former chair of the association's section on family law, is a practical video course designed to teach communicat-

ing and negotiating skills to high school students, long before they marry. Each session focuses on a different topic—sharing family income, for example, or domestic violence. Students take turns role-playing in scenarios that dramatize common domestic conflicts: who cooks if both partners are tired, say, or who decides how money is spent. Instructors ask students to identify the problem in each scenario, then to consider alternative approaches. If the staged conflict results in one partner's considering divorce, a visit with an attorney is enacted, and the teens are introduced to the harsh realities that accompany marital breakup.

My strong feelings about divorce and its effects on children have caused me to bite my tongue more than a few times during my own marriage and to think instead about what I could do to be a better wife and partner. My husband has done the same. Bill and I have worked hard at our marriage with a great deal of mutual respect and deepening love for each other. That we are blessed with Chelsea enhances our commitment.

I am not saying that there are not reasons for divorce. The abuse and violence Virginia Kelley experienced is something no parent or child should endure. But with divorce as easy as it is, and its consequences so hard, people with children need to ask themselves whether they have given a marriage their best shot and what more they can do to make it work before they call it quits.

For this reason, I am ambivalent about no-fault divorce with no waiting period when children are involved. We should consider returning to mandatory "cooling off" periods, with education and counseling for partners.

One of the many difficulties with divorce is that it becomes a public matter. It goes to court. Painful child cus-

tody decisions must be made. Regardless of individual feelings, everyone involved in the process, especially a parent, has an obligation to temper the pain children will inevitably experience.

Anyone who has raised children knows how attached they are to the security of routine. Long after divorce, they usually harbor hopes that their parents will reconcile. The anxieties that come with divorce require that parents do whatever they can to avoid creating additional uncertainty. Parents need to remember that little things often matter most—maintaining mealtimes, helping with homework, telling bedtime stories, taking weekend excursions, praying together. Children's needs must come first.

In deference to their children's feelings of shock, abandonment, and insecurity, adults have to control their own feelings, whether they are relieved and pleased at leaving a marriage, or angry and resentful at being left. This requires a degree of awareness and self-control that can be hard to muster in the midst of so traumatic an event.

Simple acts of decency and civility may be most important: Refusing to criticize the other parent to a child. Providing a decent level of child support, because your child deserves to be taken care of financially, regardless of your feelings about your former spouse. Honoring the times you promise to spend with your child. Using that time to become involved with your child's life, whether by attending sports events, volunteering at school, or simply sitting together talking. Making the effort to celebrate birthdays and holidays and attend school performances. Sparing your child adult disagreements.

As a lawyer, I handled my share of divorce cases and

tried my hardest to keep the parties out of court by working to help them solve their disagreements. Time and again I saw otherwise rational adults, twisted by revenge, jealousy, or greed, attempting to use their children as bargaining chips. Watching one parent browbeat the other over child support or property division by threatening to fight for custody or withhold visitation, I often wished I could call in King Solomon to arbitrate.

That wise king, faced with two women who both claimed to be the mother of a child, ordered that the child be cut in two, so each could receive half the body. The woman who cried out that Solomon should give the child to the other, rather than kill him, revealed herself as the real mother by placing the child's welfare above the contest over his custody. How I wish that all modern-day parents, divorce lawyers, and judges would put so high a priority on determining a child's best interests.

There are signs of hope, however. Some courts now require that divorcing parents attend classes to learn about the potential effects of divorce on their children. They are given training in ways of keeping their children out of marital conflict, opening up lines of communication, and arranging for parenting to continue in a loving and supportive manner.

I admire the way the Parent Education Program in Columbus, Ohio, treats divorce as a public health issue, "because it constitutes a major life stress for 40 percent of American children and can put many of these children at risk for long-lasting difficulties that can derail their development." Twenty-three states have already established voluntary child custody mediation programs, and four more require mediation through statewide programs.

In Michigan, the Friend of the Court system investigates and makes recommendations on custody, visitation, and support in all domestic relations matters, including divorce. The total population of Michigan is only about 4 percent of the nation's, yet that one state repeatedly collects more child support than any other—10 percent of the nation's total in 1993. At the same time, the state strictly enforces visitation rights, in line with its philosophy of treating "the non-custodial parents as more than simply a billfold."

It is incumbent on the village—friends, teachers, mediators, counselors, and ministers, among others—to advocate for children during and after divorce, especially when parents cannot or will not be there for them. Adults beyond the immediate family reached out to my mother, giving her enough support to make it through a difficult childhood. Similarly, the Louisiana teenager who wrote to me found a male role model in a friend of the family.

A long-term study of children in Hawaii examined why some children from poor and broken homes were resilient in the face of adversity while others were not. The study found that resilience depended on many factors, key among them the dependability of the adults in the child's life and the social supports available to the family.

Although children's relationships with parents, particularly their mothers, were found to be especially important, relationships with siblings, grandparents, other adult caregivers, teachers, ministers, and neighbors were significant too. The study reported that positive changes in behavior and attitudes were possible even after early childhood, "if the older child or adolescent encounters

new experiences and people who give meaning to one's life, and a reason for commitment and caring."

Anyone can provide that reason for commitment and caring, as long as he or she is stable and devoted to the best interests of the child. When a parent needs help, individuals in the village can pull a child into their embrace and provide guidance and support, informally or through organizations like Big Brothers/Big Sisters or Boy and Girl Scouts.

In the terrible times when no adequate parenting is available and the village itself must act in place of parents, it accepts those responsibilities in all our names through the authority we vest in government. That means our city, county, and state social welfare services are not only the province of their employees. They intervene in families to protect children on our behalf. And by any fair assessment of our foster care and adoption system, we are not doing a good job taking care of our children.

Approximately 450,000 children are in our foster care system at any given time, and close to 100,000 of them will not be reunited with their families. Too many children are in limbo for far too long. There are not enough qualified foster parents to go around, and those who are available are frequently discouraged from forming warm attachments with children whose futures are still uncertain. Caseworkers are overwhelmed by the numbers of children for whom they are responsible and by the severity of the emotional and physical damage many have suffered.

Loving adults are eager to offer permanent homes to many of these children. But the American adoption process can be a nightmare of complex regulations,

outdated assumptions, and institutional inertia. Public adoptions can take years, and private adoptions may be too costly for many to afford. One woman wrote to tell me how she and her husband, both musicians, had spent thousands of dollars adopting a little boy who is "the joy of our life." When her cousin's teenage daughter recently became pregnant and could not afford to keep her child, the same couple volunteered to adopt again. As simple as this case should have been—the parents and baby being members of the same extended family and all parties agreeing to the adoption—it still cost upward of \$4,000 because of legal fees and paperwork.

For others, there is the shadow of fear cast by uncommon but highly publicized cases in which birth parents sue to reverse an adoption. A forty-year-old newscaster I met in New Mexico wanted to adopt but was discouraged by notorious cases like that of Baby Richard, in which a child lived happily with his adoptive parents until his birth father won custody of him a few years later. However rare they are, such cases undermine people's faith in our adoption system and encourage them to look to other countries for children, while so many of our own country's children go without proper care or love. At an event in the East Room of the White House promoting National Adoption Month, thirteen-year-old Deanna Moppin spoke eloquently about the longings of these children: "I would have a place that I would call home. I would have a room that I would call my room. I would have a family that I could love and would love me back."

Adoption in America is also made more difficult because of a historical bias against interracial adoptions,

which can mean interminable waiting until children are matched with parents of the same race. Although many adopting parents would prefer to bring up children who share their own cultural and racial identity, many others do not have a preference and would gladly take a child of a different background. Today, despite heroic efforts by groups like One Church, One Child, there are far more minority children needing homes than there are same-race homes for them. To prevent these children from languishing in foster care, my husband signed legislation and ordered that new guidelines be put in place to prohibit federally funded agencies from using race as the sole deciding factor in placing children.

The village can take it further. We could set a goal of reducing our foster care and adoption rolls by 100,000 children each year for the next five years by moving children either back home or into adoptive families, whichever is in their best interests. We could be willing to terminate parental rights more quickly whenever physical or sexual abuse is involved. We could recruit qualified citizens to share with overworked social workers, lawyers, and judges the burden of moving children's cases through the courts. We could make decisions by birth parents to give up children for adoption more difficult to overturn, especially when a child has already become strongly attached to an adoptive family. We could ensure that government continues to cover some of the costs associated with adoption. We could enlist more businesses to follow the leadership of Wendy's president Dave Thomas, who has been vocal about businesses subsidizing adoption costs as well. In these and other ways, we can see to it that considerations like regulations, money,

skin color, and even parental rights and adult prerogatives take a back seat to the love and security children so deeply need.

Discussions of modern families often miss the point. Although the nuclear family, consisting of an adult mother and father and the children to whom they are biologically related, has proved to be the most durable and effective means of meeting children's needs over time, it is not the only form that has worked in the past or the present. I know many successful adults, like my mother and my husband, who were raised in families that did not fit the conventional mold. Others I know thrived in the care of biological and adoptive surrogates, and even in foster care or institutions. What a family looks like to outsiders is not as important as whether adults know what children need to develop positively, and work to fulfill their responsibilities to each other and to their children.

In addition, however, every society requires a critical mass of families that fit the traditional ideal, both to meet the needs of most children and to serve as a model for other adults who are raising children in difficult settings. We are at risk of losing that critical mass in America today. Parenting has never been easy, but today, when most adults consciously choose to become mothers and fathers, we owe an even higher degree of love and respect to the children we bring into this world.

Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of the families we grew up in, we get a second chance at domestic happiness when we create a family of our own. Bill and I have watched with joy as Roger and his wife, Molly, and my brother Tony and his wife, Nicole, have joined us in parenthood. We've been impressed with the willingness

our brothers have shown to participate in the daily tasks of child care, and particularly with Roger, who learned by negative example the importance of a father's influence on a son's life. Every parent makes mistakes, sometimes serious ones. But if we find mediating influences along the way, as Roger found in his mother, brother, extended family, and wife, we can learn even from the painful lessons our upbringing has to teach us.

Those of us who work hard enough—and are lucky enough—to create a flourishing family life have a bounty of joy and security to share with others less fortunate. By extending our good fortune, we create a village that acknowledges children as our first allegiance and strives to ensure that every child has at least one champion.

TALKING IT OVER

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

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The first time I met Mother Teresa was not in an urban slum or a remote village in India but in the fancy ballroom of a Washington hotel. It was February 1994, and she had just delivered a speech against abortion at the National Prayer Breakfast. When she finished her remarks, she pulled me aside for a chat.

She told me about her homes for orphaned children in New Delhi and Calcutta and asked for my help in setting up a similar home for abandoned and neglected babies in Washington, D.C. I agreed to work on the project. Although we differ on some issues, we found common ground on adoption. So we sat and talked about how to find homes for the hundreds of thousands of American children who need loving families.

A year later, my daughter and I visited Mother Teresa's home for children in New Delhi. There were too many cribs and too few toilets, and there was too little space. There was no way the place could ever pass inspection in any American city. But there were also dozens of beautiful babies, mostly girls, being fed, clothed, sheltered and loved until they could be adopted.

These images stayed with me when I returned home. I was even more determined to help Mother Teresa bring to Washington the compassion I had witnessed in India. But you cannot imagine how much red tape was getting in my way. Ironically, many regulations designed to protect children often overlook what kids need most: love and attention.

Finally, on a sweltering day this past June, the Mother Teresa Home for Children opened in an affluent residential neighborhood of the nation's capital. It is a two-story Tudor house with a swimming pool in the backyard, donated by a remarkably generous person who chose to remain anonymous. At the dedication ceremony, Mother Teresa – happy, enthusiastic and all business – took me on a tour. Grabbing my hand and leading me up the stairs, she walked me through brightly painted rooms filled with cribs, bassinets and stuffed animals.

Although it will accommodate only eight children at a time, this home is a crucial step in awakening Americans to the crisis of adoption.

We should worry less about how many cribs can be placed in a room and more about how many children can be placed with loving families. And instead of yelling at each other about abortion, we should spend our energy making adoptions easier. If that were to happen, there would be far fewer abortions and far more children in happy homes.

Today, there are about 450,000 children in the United States who need permanent families. There are tens of thousands of parents seeking to adopt.

Yet every day, complex regulations, outdated assumptions and wrong-headed laws stand in the way of bringing these parents and children together.

For some Americans, like a woman who wrote to me recently, cost is the biggest barrier. She and her husband, both musicians, spent thousands of dollars adopting a little boy six years ago. He is, she said, "the joy of our life." When her cousin's daughter recently became pregnant at age 18 and could not afford to keep the child, this same couple volunteered to adopt again.

As simple as this case should have been -- the parents and baby were members of the same extended family and all parties agreed to the adoption -- it still cost upward of \$4,000 because of legal fees and paperwork.

For others, there is a fear factor. Like many Americans, a 40-year-old newscaster I met recently in New Mexico was interested in adopting but was discouraged by highly publicized cases like Baby Richard's. However rare they are, cases in which birth parents seek to reclaim custody of adopted children undermine people's faith in the adoption system.

Decisions to give up children for adoption should be difficult to overturn, especially in the cases of children who become attached to their adoptive families during their formative years, like Baby Richard. The decision to return the child to the biological parents or to uphold the adoption should be made as quickly as possible. No child should be left in limbo.

The whole process also is made more difficult because of a historical bias against interracial adoptions, which can mean endless waiting until children are matched with parents of the same race.

In a perfect world, most of us would choose parents who shared our cultural and racial identities. But our world is not perfect. Today, there are far more minority children needing homes than are being placed for adoption. To prevent these children from languishing in foster care, new guidelines are now in place that will prohibit federally funded agencies from using race as a factor in placing children.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we did something dramatic about adoption? Why not set a goal of placing 100,000 children each year for the next five years? To do this, we would have to make adoption easier and enlist volunteer lawyers and judges to speed up the legal process. And we should also follow Mother Teresa's model, in which considerations like money, regulations and skin color do not outweigh the more important gift of love that adoptive parents want to offer.

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**TALKING IT OVER
BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

The woman visited her new daughter in the hospital every day, reaching into the incubator to stroke her foot. The receiving blanket seemed heavier than the baby, who was being fed by a tube in her stomach.

The woman is not the baby's birth mother, but she is her mother in every way that matters.

She and her husband already had a 3-year-old adopted son when they heard about a premature 1-pound baby girl whose birth parents could not take care of her. The couple decided to adopt the tiny baby. Her start was rocky, but now the child is a healthy 3-year-old.

"She was just like a little flower that blossomed," the mother says. "She is a burst of energy."

Now, the couple, who are African-American, are in the process of adopting a 12-year-old girl who was abused. They also are encouraging more African-American families to open their homes to children in need.

Last summer, I wrote about this important issue. I'm writing about it again because so many children's lives would be better if they could only find a home. Today, 21,000 children are ready and waiting for families to nurture and care for them. Tens of thousands of others will be eligible for adoption in the coming months and years.

Not all these children are healthy, white babies. Many are physically and developmentally disabled. Many are minorities. Many suffer from emotional traumas wrought by abuse, neglect and unstable living arrangements. And many are teenagers who already have been shuffled from home to home.

Fortunately, some steps have been taken in recent years to make adoption easier. The Family and Medical Leave Act, which became law three years ago, ensures that parents can take time off when they adopt a child without fear of losing their jobs. The Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 prohibits adoption agencies from denying the placement of a child solely on the basis of the adoptive parents' race, color or national origin. Over the past three years, adoption subsidies have helped an increasing number of families cope with the costs of adopting and raising children with special needs.

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The President is supporting legislation in Congress that will give tax credits to families that adopt. The House, for example, just approved a bill that would give adoptive families a \$5,000 tax credit. The Senate, meanwhile, is considering a \$7,500 credit for families who adopt children with special needs. This may not be enough to cover medical and emotional health care costs for special-needs kids, or even education, but it's a step in the right direction.

Not only is adoption good for children, it saves taxpayers a lot of money. As one woman said at a recent adoption discussion at the White House her family has saved the state and the federal government in excess of \$1 million by adopting several special-needs children.

In addition to government, the private sector also has a role to play. Wendy's, the hamburger chain founded by adoption advocate Dave Thomas (who himself was adopted), gives workers paid leave and financial assistance with adoption costs.

Margaret Fitzgerald, who participated in our gathering, said her employer, AT&T, gave her six weeks of unpaid leave when she and her husband adopted a son four years ago. The company also reimbursed her legal fees.

But the most important thing of all is for more people to reach out and give every child, regardless of age, disability, race or ethnic origin, the chance to be part of a loving family.

Just ask Julie Stinger, a teacher with five adopted children -- four biracial and one white -- several of whom had health problems. She told us how, as a white woman, she had to fight to adopt her first two black children, even though the birth parents agreed to the adoption and she had cared for them as a foster parent for 18 months. "I fought tooth and nail," she said.

Later, she had similar trouble when she wanted to adopt her fifth child, who is white. Authorities were concerned about placing a white boy with four non-white brothers and sisters.

"Even though we went through some traumas in the adoptions, I would do it again, I would do it 10 times over," she said. "Adopting a child is the most gratifying thing that ever happened to me."

After Julie recounted her story, I asked her oldest son, Joey, if he had anything to add. He nodded.

"I just want to thank my mother," he said.

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